THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

ELLERY QUEEN'S

Mystery Magazine

10 NEW stories

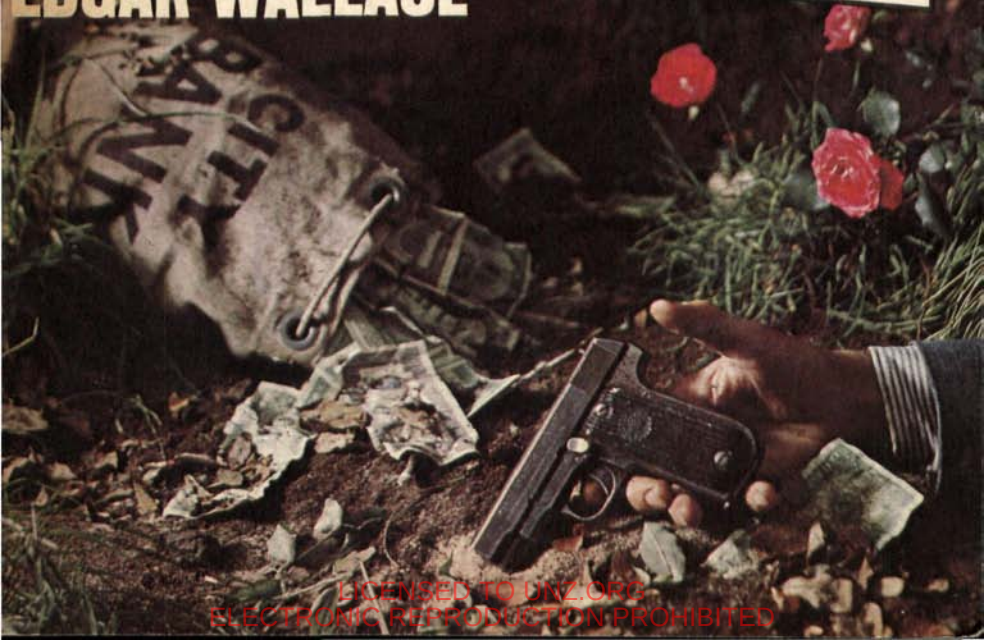
short stories by

HUGH PENTECOST
JULIAN SYMONS
STUART CLOETE
EDGAR WALLACE

NEW short novel —complete!

JAMES YAFFE

MOM REMEMBERS



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A SMALL SUPPLY OF ELLERY QUEEN'S 1968 ANTHOLOGY IS STILL AVAILABLE

The 1968 Edition, Vol. 14, is still available direct from the publisher. You'll find mystery, suspense, detective and crime stories that have never before appeared in any previous Anthology. There's enough "edge-of-the-seat" excitement to satisfy the most demanding of mystery readers. For those of you who have never before read ELLERY QUEEN'S ANTHOLOGY, the authors listed on the cover certainly should indicate to you the kind of top-notch reading there is in store for you.

The 1968 ANTHOLOGY is $1.25. All you have to do is fill out the coupon below.

ELLERY QUEEN'S ANTHOLOGY 1968 Edition
505 Park Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10022

EQ-1-68

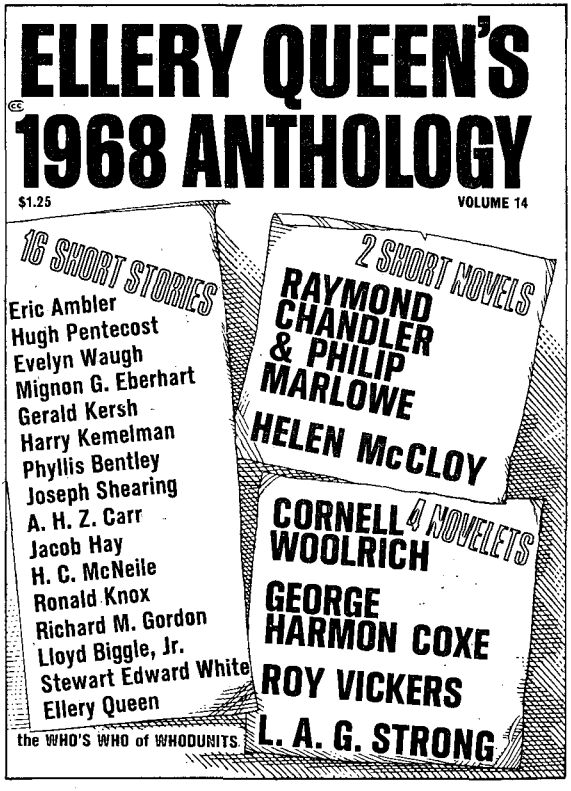
Please send me_____copies of ELLERY QUEEN'S ANTHOLOGY 1968 Edition Volume 14. Enclosed is $1.25 PLUS 25¢ for postage & handling for each copy.

Name_____
(please print)

Address_____

City_____State_____Zip_____

(Turn to page 24 for extra coupon)



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Night frights...

DEAD BY THE LIGHT OF THE MOON

Tobias Wells. The night of the great blackout, Detective Knute Severson got the usual phone call from Miss Lacey: "There's a man trying to get into my apartment." This time, someone was. $3.95

JUSTICE ON THE ROCKS

Bill Knox. At night, the back alleys of Glasgow crawl with teenage toughs. But when detectives Thane and Moss go there to cool a rumble, they are presented with a younger problem — an innocent six year old in mortal danger. $3.95

WALK INTO YESTERDAY

Mildred Davis. She awakened in a strange institution, surrounded by freaks, not even able to remember her own face and name. It was an unspeakable nightmare. But she was soon to learn some things are best left forgotten. $3.95

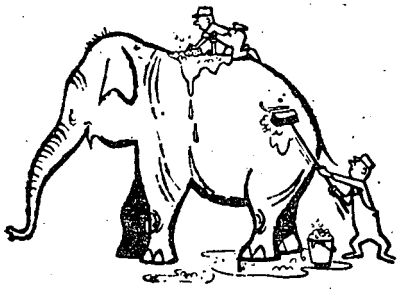
THE RELUCTANT MEDIUM

L. P. Davies. In the dead of night, a limping footstep accompanied by an eerie whistle and the scent of verbena, announces the arrival of a ghost — or a hoax. Either way, it's murder. $3.95

. . . from The Crime Club

DOUBLEDAY

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



WE'RE CLEANING UP!

...and look what we found—the hiding place of a number of back issues of EQMM! And all these magazines are in never-used, mint condition.

And now that we've discovered this secret hiding place, we would like to make a sensational offer to all loyal mystery fans of EQMM.

You can purchase 10 issues of EQMM for only $2.50—or 20 issues for only $4.00—a tremendous 60% savings. These are the same "whodunits" that regularly sell at 50¢ at newsstands and by subscription.

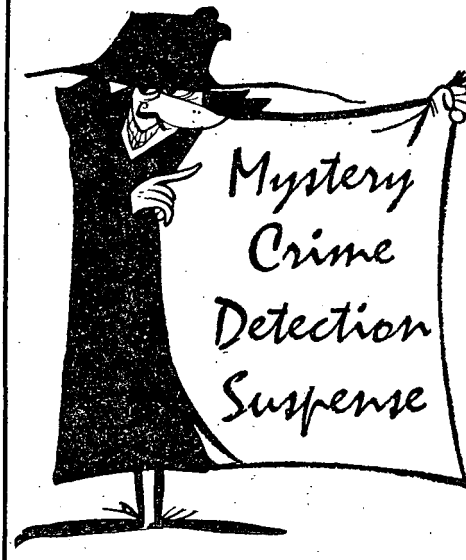
So don't wait—first come first served. Of course, you understand that the supply is limited, and that we cannot fill requests for specific issues.

Use the coupon below and we'll rush you a Jumbo package of suspenseful reading.

ELLERY QUEEN'S HOUSEKEEPER EQ-1-68
505 Park Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10022

I am enclosing _____ $2.50 for 10 issues; _____ $4.00 for 20 issues; Rush me the assorted back copies of EQMM.

Name_____
(Please Print)
Address_____
City_____ State_____ Zip_____



There's no reason for you to miss the fascinating reading of the greatest of mystery writers. You can find it in each and every issue of EQMM.

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE EQ-1-68
505 Park Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10022

Please enter my subscription to ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE—6 issues for $3.00.

☐ $3.00 enclosed ☐ Bill me

Name_____
(Please print)
Address_____
City_____ State_____ Zip_____

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The World's Leading Mystery Magazine

ELLERY QUEEN'S
Mystery Magazine

DETECTIVE SHORT NOVEL—complete

MOM REMEMBERS — James Yaffe — 128

DETECTIVE SHORT STORIES

FILE #2: STAKEOUT ON PAGE STREET — Joe Gores — 6

THE MURDER IN THE RUE ROYALE — Michael Harrison — 43

WITH THE COMPLIMENTS OF COMUS — Ellery Queen — 67

NO WITNESSES ON THE WATERFRONT — Hugh Pentecost — 90

FATHER CRUMLISH CELEBRATES CHRISTMAS — Alice Scanlan Reach — 99

A PEARL AMONG WOMEN — Julian Symons — 117

CRIME SHORT STORIES

THE FATHER CHRISTMAS JOB — Edgar Wallace — 18

THE SECOND NAIL — Stuart Cloete — 28

FIRST OFFENSE — Stephen Dentinger — 35

A FELINE FELONY — Lael J. Littke — 122

EQMM "FIRST STORIES"

THE BURNING OF A WITCH — Eve Christmas — 58

THE PROMISE OF HIS COMING — Mel D. Ames — 64

HARDCOVERS AND PAPERBACKS OF THE MONTH — 34

BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH — Anthony Boucher — 115

PUBLISHER: *B. G. Davis* — EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: *Ellery Queen*

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, Vol. 51, No. 1, Whole No. 290, JAN. 1968. Published monthly by Davis Publications, Inc., at 50c a copy. Annual subscription $6.00 in U.S.A., and possessions and Canada; $7.00 in the Pan American Union; $7.00 in all other countries. Editorial and General Offices, 505 Park Ave., New York, N. Y. 10022. Change of address notices, undeliverable copies, orders for subscriptions, and other mail items are to be sent to 505 Park Ave., New York, N. Y. 10022. Office of Publication — 10 Ferry St., Concord, N. H. 03301. Second-Class postage paid at Concord, N. H. *© 1967 by Davis Publications, Inc. All rights reserved. Protection secured under the Universal Copyright Convention and the Pan American Copyright Convention.* *Printed in U.S.A. Submission must be accompanied by stamped self-addressed envelope; the Publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts.*

MPA

JOEL DAVIS, *Assistant Publisher* — CLAYTON RAWSON, *Managing Editor*
LEONARD F. PINTO, *Production Director* — CONSTANCE DI RIENZO, *Executive Editorial Secretary*
IRVING BERNSTEIN, *Art Director*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a NEW skiptracing procedural

— plus

Last month we started a new series of unusual procedural stories —"File #1: The Mayfield Case"—about Daniel Kearny Associates, a skiptracing agency specializing in frauds, defalcations, and embezzlements. DKA is a tough, true-to-life agency, with headquarters in San Francisco; its cases are told in fiction form, but the procedures are factual, and the semidocumentary approach charges the stories with a hard, convincing truth.

Here is the second in Mr. Gores's series—a story as realistic and meaningful as this morning's newspaper; a story with the climate of our times, with the importance of what is happening today, now, all over the world; a story about the "bearded, long-haired, miniskirted, ponchoed; acid-heads, pot-blowers, freak-outs; the tuned-in, turned-on, dropped-out, unwashed hippies of The Haight-Ashbury"—the "Hashbury," the background of "Psychedelphia."

But something more—much more . . .

FILE #2: STAKEOUT ON PAGE STREET

by JOE GORES

BARTON HESLIP CARRIED THEIR drinks over to his rather broken-down couch and switched off the floor lamp; the street light outside, filtered through ancient lace curtains, was kinder to the apartment. Lou Rawls was soulin' from the record player.

"What you put in these drinks, honey?" Corinne's black eyes gleamed suspiciously from her heart-shaped face, less black than his. She was strikingly pretty, with high cheekbones and a wide warm mouth. Heslip could feel her body heat through the knobbly weave of her suit.

"Bourbon, baby. Just bourbon."

"It tastes more like kerosene."

"I didn't notice you offering to kick in for the bottle, baby."

She giggled and burrowed into the crook of his arm. "Bart, how come you to ever quit fighting?"

"I looked in the mirror one morning and heard those angel wings flapping. Ears getting thick, scar tissue forming around the mouth." He shrugged. "I decided that was all she wrote."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He tightened his arm around her shoulders and she came to him urgently, face raised, lips parted, eyes burning hungrily.

The phone shrilled.

After the fourth ring Heslip groaned and padded on stockinged feet across the room, moving with the easy grace of the trained athlete. His exaggerated breadth of shoulder and depth of chest made him seem much bigger than his 158 pounds. He was almost plum-black, with kinky hair and the inevitable thin mustache. His tight-clipped head seemed too small for the muscular column of his neck.

"Yeah?" he growled into the phone.

"Bart? Larry Ballard. Listen—"

"You listen, cat: it's past two thirty in the Sunday ayem,"

"Bart, I spotted this car from the skip list and tailed it until the guy parked. 1965 Dodge Dart, green, license Baker, X-Ray, Eddy, 1-9-9. But you see, my skip list is a month old, and I thought—"

Heslip's face was that of a boxer just before the bell. His voice was thin with excitement. "Was a Negro cat driving it? Young stud about our age, maybe with a chick who has long black hair?"

"Yeah. He was a Negro. She went into an address on Page Street, in The Haight-Ashbury, and he took off walking."

"You cut back to that car and take out the coil wire so it won't start—but *don't* move the car. It's registered to a Gloria Jensen, and the cat is Floyd Matthews. Wanted by the cops for statutory rape. If he knew we'd caught up with the car, he'd think the cops had, too, and he'd cut out. Oh, and you'd better call Mr. Kearny at home on the radio."

"Two thirty in the morning?"

"He'll know how to contact the cops handling the case. I'll be in my car in five minutes; radio your location." He started to hang up, then added, "You should have taken out the coil wire *before* you called me."

He padded into the bedroom, unmindful of the girl on the couch. If the car was gone—Larry had been a Daniel Kearny Associates' field agent for only three months; Heslip had been with DKA three years. Larry had ridden with him as a trainee, and a close friendship had developed between them.

Heslip riffled through his SKIP folder, found the Gloria Jensen assignment. Delinquent seven months, now being handled on a contingent basis: they would be paid for their investigation and their expenses only if the vehicle was recovered. A voice brought him up short.

"Hey, lover boy, you disremember something?"

"Huh?" Then he laughed and crossed to the couch and switched on the floor lamp. Corinne Jones slammed her highball glass down on the coffee table bitterly.

"I didn't mean no damned floor lamp, lover. I meant *me*."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Heslip, flipping through the mass of reports and memo carbons stapled face-out to the back of the assignment sheet, spoke without looking up. "Sorry, honey, but this is a hot one and—"

"Lover, you got a hot one right here." Then she also laughed; it was deep rich laughter which lit up her whole face. "I swear, Barton Heslip, once we're married you're gonna get yourself a new job."

"I like this one, honey."

He sat down on the couch to lace his shoes. It was an old argument between them; but O'Bannon assured him it was one carried on as a running dialogue between every married field investigator and his wife. Something had chased the laughter from Corinne's face.

"And I s'pose here goes our picnic tomorrow—today, rather."

Heslip was pulling on his dark windbreaker. "This'll just take a couple of hours. You get some sleep, I'll be right back."

She grunted and uttered a very distinct Anglo-Saxon noun as he waggled his fingers at her and slid through the front door, out into the chill San Francisco morning, just three minutes after hanging up the phone. The narrow, high-shouldered old Victorian houses seemed drawn up against the cold Pacific mist. Down in the Bay the foghorns were bawling at one another. He coaxed his company Plymouth into life, flicked on the radio, and drove toward The Haight-Ashbury.

The radio blared unintelligibly. He adjusted the squelch and Ballard's voice came in: "SF 6 calling SF 3. Come in, Bart."

Heslip depressed his mike's red TRANSMIT button. "Go ahead."

"Affirmative on that coil wire; my 10-20 is Page and Cole. I have instructions from Mr. Kearny, over."

"Tell me when I get there," said Heslip. "SF 3 clear."

It was nearly three a.m., but The Drug Store coffeehouse on Haight and Masonic was jammed with teens and post-teens, juveniles up to forty years old, white, black, and brown; bearded, long-haired, miniskirted, ponchoed; acid-heads, pot-blowers, freak-outs; the tuned-in, turned-on, dropped-out, unwashed hippies of The Haight-Ashbury. Psychedelphia.

Two years before the district had been scheduled for a bisecting freeway; the hippie head-count had risen as the rents had fallen. Heslip didn't know what the subject and Matthews were doing there, since he had turned up their liaison only this past Friday; the cops didn't have it yet. This put DKA in the enviable position of being able to do a favor for the police, which never hurt.

He identified Ballard's Ford on the corner of Page and Cole by its tall whippet aerial. A spark glowed carelessly from the front seat as he drove by, parked on Cole, and walked back.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

When he opened the door, Ballard said, "The Dart's two up from the corner, across Page—in front of that VW bus painted all those screwy colors. She's in 1718 Page, at the far end of the block."

Heslip punched him lightly on the arm. "I could see your cigarette when I came up the street."

"Not from that apartment—I've kept it cupped in my hand."

Ballard was a lean man, conditioned like a basketball player, his hard blue eyes oddly at variance with his mid-twenties face. He was dressed in slacks and a white shirt and a windbreaker. Heslip went into his detachable accent, which was useful in getting information from newly arrived southern Negroes who would mistrust a well-spoken black man nearly as much as they would a white one.

"What if de *boss* man come up de street *be*hin' de car an' see dat cigarette like Ah done, huh?"

Ballard shrugged and grinned. "What do you expect at three in the morning? Saul Panzer? Dan says an Inspector Benny Nicolette will be here to stake out the apartment, and you're supposed to stake out the car. Apparently Matthews is a travel agent for the hippies."

"A pusher, huh? Visit heaven on a sugar cube." Which would explain their presence in The Haight-Ashbury; this was obviously his market area. "You gonna hang around for the fun?"

"Can't. I was leaving for Eureka when I spotted the Dart; I've got to be there at noon to pick up that black '67 T-Bird for Cal-Cit."

"Better split, cat; you got close to six hundred miles, half of 'em dragging a tow. You did a damned good job of spotting on this Dart." He opened the door as Ballard started the engine. The street was totally deserted. "What does the subject look like?"

"Black hair worn long and pressed flat. Miniskirt and white stockings with knit designs. Heavy three-color sweater. Wild figure, but I didn't get a look at the face."

"Where's the coil wire?"

Ballard brought it out from under the seat and Heslip stuck it in his jacket pocket, and watched Ballard out of sight. Then he sauntered across Page and past the green Dodge Dart. Man! He'd wanted this car for five months, and here it was.

He kept right on, past 1718 Page—a tiny frame building with an empty store on the ground floor, a single apartment above. Its pale green paint was flaking. Next to the building was an alleyway stuffed with boxes of trash and supermarket bags full of garbage. None of the windows in the twin bays had drapes or shades. No lights showed anywhere.

A black Mercury stopped on the corner of Clayton and a heavily built man in his early forties got out to block Heslip's way. He wore slacks and sports shirt with a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

screaming herringbone jacket that would have made him look like a Fillmore Street pimp, except he was white.

"Benny Nicolette," he introduced himself. He had a surprisingly high, squeaky voice, and his face missed meekness only by the eyes. They were cop's eyes. He stuck out a hand and Heslip took it. "I met you at Dan Kearny's."

"Sure," said Heslip. "Good to see you again."

A sandy-haired giant, a full head taller than Heslip, came around the back of the car. His jaw jutted, his eyes were muddy and utterly flat, like twin pools of stagnant water.

"This is my partner, Sandy MacLashlin," said Nicolette. "Bart Heslip, Mac. Dan Kearny's man."

MacLashlin nodded without removing his hands from his pockets. He was chewing on a toothpick. Heslip drew back his own hand quickly, annoyed with his own slight anger at MacLashlin's snub.

"I hear this Matthews got a white chick with him." MacLashlin had a flat-planed, savage face. "Any white girl shacks with a—" His eyes were intense on Heslip's face; he spat noisily into the gutter.

"You sure she's still living with Matthews?" said Nicolette.

"She was Friday, when I got the lead." Heslip's voice was sullen.

Nicolette nodded. "We'll try to take him on the street, Bart, so we don't have to impound the car. You got an eyeball of him?"

"No, just of the girl, from the guy who spotted the car."

Walking away, Heslip found that his hands were fisted at his sides like rocks gathered for a stoning. Remember, baby, he's just a little old hater. Maintain cool. But in the car he slammed his fist into the dashboard several times. Oh, how he wanted to open up the side of that MacLashlin's jaw like a can of tomato sauce and spread those big white Mr. Charlie teeth around.

Time passed without a person moving on Page Street, not anyone at all. Twice a prowl car went by. It was getting light. At six thirty MacLashlin appeared, walking down Cole. Even giving him fifty pounds, Heslip decided, he could take the big man. He'd won 39 out of 40 fights, 27 by K.O.; in the service he'd fought all the way up to heavy just to find opponents, and he still worked out three times a week. MacLashlin opened the door to hike in his solid backside, tossing away a chewed toothpick.

"Little bar up the street here, The Alpine, opens at six a.m." He belched. "I gotta spend my Sunday waiting for some boog to show up, may as well enjoy myself, huh, Heslip?"

"Whatever you say, Inspector." Heslip stared straight ahead.

"You sure this Matthews isn't a friend of yours?" When Heslip didn't respond, he leaned closer; his grin was sour with cheap bar whiskey. "Bet you make it with the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

white chicks, huh?" His tone harshened. "Matthews made it with some runaway fifteen-year-old while she was high on pot. White girl from Piedmont. Rich folks. They signed the complaint."

Heslip met the muddy eyes. 'Maybe you plan on having him resist arrest a little bit if he shows up?"

MacLashlin nodded judiciously. "Maybe something like that."

"I'm here to repossess a car, Inspector."

"*Keep* it that way."

Heslip watched him out of sight. He slid lower in his seat and breathed deeply to relax, to thrust MacLashlin from his mind. When would Matthews be back? Larry had done a damned good job spotting that car. Good man, Larry. Had almost quit over the Mayfield case last month, but Mr. Kearny—

His door was wrenched open, nearly spilling him into the street. Dan Kearny's cold gray eyes were regarding him from a yard away.

"Nice nap, Heslip? Eight o'clock. They shoot sentries for that."

"Just dozed off this second, Dan." He shot a surreptitious look at the Dart. "The girl's still in 1718 Page, and the car is right—"

"I saw it." Kearny had climbed in; he leaned forward to punch the dash lighter. He was a stocky, compact man with a flattened nose, thinning curly hair, and a jaw to crack gravel. As he'd done for three years, he offered a cigarette; Heslip refused it as he'd done for three years. Pungent smoke filled the car.

"Nicolette's partner is riding me, Dan. Hard."

Kearny looked up sharply. His face was square and pugnacious and his eyes were chipped from flint.

"If you're going to start something, do it on your own time."

"Nothing like that." But Heslip knew he wasn't sure. He went into his dialect routine. "Boss, Ah sure as hebbin thought this yere *was* ma own time. Ah mean, it bein' de *Lawd*'s day an' all dat."

Kearny started to grin. "Quit clowning. Do you think this stakeout will nail Matthews?"

"I think I should just ask her when he's coming back. Hell, if he's pushing pot and acid in The Haight-Ashbury, Dan, she's used to Negro cats coming around to make buys."

Kearny drew thoughtfully on his cigarette, then nodded and stubbed it out in the ashtray. "Right. I'll go talk to Benny about it."

Heslip waited. You had to hand it to Kearny. Seven years before, at 36, he'd founded DKA with one car, a field man named O'Bannon, an old Victorian building on Golden Gate Avenue which once had been a bawdy house, and a Japanese secretary named Kathy Onoda who now was Office Manager. By specializing in frauds, defalcations, and embezzlements—and in the recovery of the chattels or money in-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

volved—Daniel Kearny Associates blanketed the state of California.

Page Street was waking up. A Spanish woman went by with a small girl, obviously going to Mass. Three hippies went by, just as obviously not going anywhere. Their steps were languid, their violently unconventional dress merely another sort of conformity. Long greasy hair and unkempt beards; an ancient poncho, a red-lined evening cape, a serape; dirty ski cord trousers; two pairs of boots, one set of thonged leggings; tiny jingling bells on one ankle and golden hoops in pierced ears. Heslip was invisible to them: he was with it, cool, he dug, because black cats always were with it, cool, and dug.

Kearny returned. "Benny says wait until ten o'clock, and see him afterwards so he knows what happens. MacLashlin didn't like it."

"He's afraid I'll tip off the Jensen chick to the stakeout."

Kearny nodded and went away.

Foot traffic increased; a few cars went by, Sunday-slow. His rear-view mirror was twisted so he could see the Dart without turning. Two old duffers appeared in it, standing on the corner in the sun with their arms folded on their chests. One of them gestured at a group of passing hippies.

"Look at 'em," he said aggrievedly. "They don't do nothing. All day they don't do nothing. They walk up and down the street." He thought for a moment. "They don't do as much as *I* do, and I don't do nothing."

Heslip rolled up his window, locked the car, and crossed Page Street. The VW bus behind the Dart had Idaho license plates and was a sunburst of red, yellow, tan, brown, orange, blue (two shades), black, and green rectangles of varying sizes. On the back was an ornate red and gold sign, *Make Love Not War,* and on the side was painted the single purple word, *Rejoice.* A pilgrim newly arrived in Mecca. They descended on The Haight-Ashbury in droves, seeking free love, symbiotic relationships, acid, pot, and the ultimate turn-on that would congeal mankind into a quivering jelly of love.

Heslip lifted a lip unconsciously. You made it on your own, baby, or you didn't make it.

Four small Negro kids were sprawled across the sidewalk like the spokes of a wheel, their hub an open comic book. A middle-aged white woman emerged from a well-kept apartment house to glare at Heslip, sniff at the children, and flounce down the street. On the next stoop three Negro women exclaimed over a box of candy; behind them a white man in bedroom slippers cursed some electric doorbell wires he was twisting with a linesman's pliers.

The stairwell to 1718 Page was smeared with small dirty handprints. Heslip knocked firmly on the door at the head of the stairs. A

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

white girl opened it. Gloria Jensen. Her file said 26 but she looked 35. Her eyes were pouched, her black hair filmed and lifeless; the broken-bottle scar on her cheek was recent enough to have been a gift from Floyd Matthews.

Three years before she would have been truly striking; now only the full, ripe body thrusting out against her striped sailor's jersey and hip-huggers made any pretense at youth. Her bare feet were gray with ancient dirt.

"You want who, dad?" Her intonation and voice-timbre were an unconscious copying of Negro speech patterns.

"Floyd here?" He broadened his vowels into, "Flauid heayh?"

She moved back from the door, conned. "Like what's the gig?"

"I'm *Re*joice." He accented the first syllable of the word he'd borrowed from the VW bus. "*Re*joice Jackson. My—" He checked suddenly, suspiciously. "Okay to talk?"

"Like sure. Come on in, man, but Floyd's not here, y'know?"

There were no rugs, no curtains, no stove, no refrigerator, no furniture apart from a wooden table and two chairs, one leaning up against a wall at a disconsolate angle. Two mattresses were side by side under a dirty swirl of sheets like old mashed potatoes. For decoration there were several bright, mildly pornographic "psychedelic" posters in the hippie style of Wes Wilson and The Family Dog.

Heslip took the sturdier-looking chair, the girl the other. On the table stood a typewriter with manuscript paper piled beside it.

"Word is that Floyd's a cat with good acid," he said cautiously.

"Like he'll be back in an hour. We gotta be cool, the fuzz wanta bust him on a 226B." Her face became indignant. "Bum rap, y'know? She like begged him. We've got some speed, and some real gone grass at ten dollars a lid, but acid—" She shook her head.

Speed: dexedrine, benzedrine, methedrine. Grass: marijuana. Favored "head" drugs of the hippies, who scorned heroin, opium, barbiturates, alcohol, and tranquilizers as "body" drugs which were depressants, turning the user off rather than on.

"I need acid, man, like twenty tabs at least." Two thousand milligrams of lysergic acid diethylamide, eighty bucks' worth; plenty to interest a small-time retail pusher like Matthews. He added, "Say, Floyd doesn't have a connection for the Big H, does he?"

"He wouldn't *touch* the Heavy, Rejoice. He just wants to help people turn on." She gestured proudly at the typewriter. "He turned me on to acid because I'm a writer, y'know?" Her nervous fingers were weaving febrile air pictures. "He gave me a tab right in this room. I started freaking freely, I could hear him talking but my mind was going out and coming back between

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his syllables, like fly casting, y'know? I'd read Huxley, I wanted it to be the *writing* experience, like an experiment sort of thing, y'know?"

Her face and voice had become agitated; she hugged herself abruptly, as if she were cold. "But I just wasn't capable, y'know? I mean, Floyd said I was coming out with these great things, these great insights, but it just wasn't *me*." She was silent for a long moment, then she shuddered. "It was a bad trip. Since then I just blow pot."

Heslip stood up abruptly, filled with pity. "Yeah. Like, ah, gotta trip around a little, dig? Maybe I run into Floyd, I dig him by what he's wearing, y'know?"

"Sure. Ah—Kelly green ski cords and a like olive-green velour shirt with short sleeves. I mean very distinctive."

Emerging into bright sunshine was like leaving the smells of a sickroom: the slightly fermented sweetness of pot, ill-disguised with incense; the sharp urinous reek of a toilet carelessly unflushed for a week; the acrid chalkiness of spilled milk, soured on cabinet tops. As he often did after catching up with a bad skip, Heslip had a sense of unreality: he knew more about Gloria Jensen than her mother, probably more than the wig-picker she'd consulted in 1966 . . . whom she'd sat behind in eleventh-grade English; her graduate sociology grades at Berkeley; the doctor who'd been supplying her with birth-control pills since her Tijuana abortion the year before; which garage had an unsatisfied $42.38 repair lien on the Dodge Dart.

He sat down on the steps of an old Victorian, out of sight of the apartment, and waited until Inspector Nicolette walked up to join him.

"Matthews is expected back by noon. Wearing green ski cords and a short-sleeved olive-green velour shirt. Whatever the hell that is."

"My wife was talking one day, said it looks like a cheap velvet," said Nicolette in his deceptive squeak. "Think she burned you?"

"No chance. I know the type—civil rights, pot, social protest."

"I just bet you do." MacLashlin had left the stakeout car; his eyes were bloodshot and his breath reeked of stale whiskey. "Why'd you take so long up there, Heslip?"

Heslip let it pass.

MacLashlin belched suddenly, explosively. "This boy a pusher like we heard?"

"I wouldn't know about that, Inspector."

MacLashlin turned to his partner. "I think he burned the stakeout to her, Benny. I think I'd better go up there and sniff around."

"She'd make you as fuzz in ten seconds," said Heslip flatly.

Nicolette said mildly, "She doesn't have to let you in, Mac. Officially we don't know she exists. Anything you found in a search would be inadmissible as evidence anyway."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Heslip left them still discussing it, and went back down Page Street to a stoop just three cars away from the Dart. Sitting in the sun he clenched and unclenched his fists.

A hippie came to roost like a chunky stork on the white fire hydrant on the corner and opened a paperback book titled *Leisure—the Basis of Culture*. He wore his hair in long yellow unkempt curls; he had a sleeping bag slung on a leather strap over his right shoulder.

Twenty minutes later Heslip saw MacLashlin cross Page toward 1718. He started up with an audible curse, then settled back. He knew that to the girl, MacLashlin would have FUZZ emblazoned across his chest in letters three feet high. To hell with him. His concern was the "repro"—the car. The blond hippie on the fire hydrant threw him a puzzled look and returned to his reading. After eight minutes MacLashlin left again.

A black man clacked by in pointy narrow shoes which flashed in the sunlight like knife blades. He was tall and meaty, slightly stooped, wearing a full mustache that drooped over the corners of his mouth. Heslip glanced up casually, then did a double-take. Kelly green ski cords. Olive green short-sleeved shirt that looked like velvet. Heslip stood up. Good old Floyd Matthews had come home.

Matthews had the car key in his hand, but continued on past the Dart toward 1718. Good. Ten paces beyond it. Fifteen. The car was out of it.

At the far end of the block Inspector Nicolette's screaming jacket was crossing Page. MacLashlin's bulk was just rounding the corner on the odd-numbered side of Page. Both men moved casually, so the intercept would be just before Matthews reached the apartment.

Then the window facing Matthews on the near-side bay was thrown up. Gloria Jensen's face appeared, white and tense.

"Fuzz!" she shrieked. *"Split!"*

The big Negro spun like a halfback and raced toward Heslip, almost before the second word had left the girl's mouth. MacLashlin was clearing the parked cars across Page, his revolver dwarfed in his huge paw, but he was half a block behind. Nicolette, sprinting, his pistol out, was even farther away. Neither man could shoot. Matthews would be around the corner and away before they could catch him.

Not Heslip's business.

So he jammed a foot between the running man's legs.

Matthews went down, skidded, came up snarling. Heslip was between him and the corner. Face contorted, Matthews whipped out a switchblade and lunged, all in a single movement, so fast it was a blur.

Heslip, on his toes like a bullfighter, saw the blade flash by an inch from his belly, and chopped a short hard left into the big man's unprotected midsection. His face went

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gray, he faltered: and then the leather strap of the blond hippie's sleeping bag was flipped over Heslip's shoulders from behind. He was jerked off his feet by a vicious snap of the leather.

Heslip's body was momentarily supported by the strap. His knees pumped to his chin, then shot straight out like pistons. His heels caught Matthews above the heart with a force that smashed the big man against the apartment building like a swatted fly. The switchblade went flying.

As it did, Heslip heaved his weight forward against the strap. He went down, hard, and the blond hippie was flipped clumsily over his head, right into MacLashlin's arms. The big hands fielded him expertly, whirled him, and slammed him up against the side of a parked car. Heslip darted forward, pumped fists into Matthews until the man's eyes rolled up and he sagged down the wall. Heslip danced back waiting for the count.

Inspector Nicolette trotted up, panting. Heslip's head ached. It wasn't good to let go like that, to lose control; but the first blow had transferred all his frustrated rage at MacLashlin to the luckless Matthews.

MacLashlin had frisked and cuffed his blond prisoner. He said disgustedly, "Hell, he don't even *know* Matthews. Just heard someone yell that we were fuzz, so he decided to help out against us."

Heslip realized there hadn't been sight or sound of Gloria Jensen since her Paul Revere act. She probably was very busy flushing her ex-lover's pharmacopoeia down the toilet. Maybe now she'd go visit her family in Carmel for a while. She'd have to walk.

Nicolette snapped the cuffs on Matthews and jerked him ungently to his feet, ignoring his moans, and they trundled the two cuffed men to their car and thrust them into the rear seat.

"I guess that's it," said MacLashlin in a satisfied voice. Nicolette was radioing for a cruiser to take the prisoners in for booking.

"Not quite." Heslip's voice was soft. "You an' me got a li'l frien'ly sparrin' to do. No badge. No gun. No uniform, baby."

"*Fight* you? You crazy, boy?" MacLashlin had an odd look in his eyes. "I'm a policeman on duty. Benny and me—"

Nicolette said abruptly, "You're on your own till the squad car comes, Mac."

Crimson shot into MacLashlin's face. Heslip put a hand in the middle of the big man's chest and pushed, almost contemptuously. The muscles whitened along MacLashlin's jaw as his eyes darted from one to the other. Suddenly the tension left him.

"Can I walk on the ceiling?" He shrugged and turned away.

Heslip had never had a finer compliment. MacLashlin didn't want to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fight, not because he feared a beating, but because he might be humiliated by a black man. Then Nicolette's voice jerked at his partner like a bullwhip wrapped around his neck.

"Mac! You still owe him an apology."

"What the hell goes on?" MacLashlin's face was chalk; he backed away uneasily, looking from one to the other, hand on holster.

Heslip realized that Nicolette was going to push it. And MacLashlin would have to give in, because Nicolette was the harder. Two officers, partners in an unmarked car, had to depend on each other's judgment, intuition, and guts to stay alive. To Nicolette it really had nothing to do with Heslip, or the color of his skin.

Heslip cleared his throat. "Thanks, Benny," he said levelly. "But don't bother. It would break his teeth to say it."

Turning away, he caught amazement on MacLashlin's brutal features. It was enough.

He could feel their eyes on his back, burning like sunlight through a glass as he walked away; then a black-and-white cruiser swung into Clayton from Oak, and the feeling was gone. Suddenly he felt fine.

He pulled the coil wire from his pocket. Yeah! Dodge Dart, delinquent seven months. In twenty minutes more he'd have it in the barn. Tomorrow the Jensen file at DKA would go into the CLOSED tub.

He flipped up the hood of the car; then a thought sagged his jaw. Corinne! He hadn't even called her! How was he going to square last night? And the missed picnic today? He slowly replaced the coil wire. You in some mighty deep stuff, baby. But then he grinned. He began humming.

His tune was: *A Good Man Is Hard To Find.*

Hell, man, all he had to do was convince Corinne of that.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **EDGAR WALLACE**

TITLE: ***The Father Christmas Job***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: Aboard the *Beramic*

TIME: A generation ago

COMMENTS: *Another memoir of Felix Jenks, the ocean-going steward, who sees all, hears all, but doesn't always tell all . . .*

WHAT'S THAT WORD THAT THEY use to describe an airplane that can come down either on the sea or the land?" It was Felix Jenks, the steward, inquiring. "Amphibian! That's it. It was the name our old Captain gave 'em. In the days when I was steward on board the old *Majestic*—you remember how she killed a stoker every voyage—there used to be a crowd that worked its way across twice a year—the only crowd I ever knew that mixed it, both on land and sea.

"Amphibians are rare. A man either works ships or he works towns. If a ship's crowd works a town at all, it is with people they've got to know on board ship. Somebody said that a ship is like a prison, with a chance of being drowned. It is certainly a bit too restricted for people who want to sell gold bricks, or have had a lot of money left to them to distribute to the poor, providing they can find the right kind of man to give it away.

"The point I want to make is this: that the ship crowd and the land crowd very seldom work together, and if the land people *do* travel by sea, they've got to behave themselves, and not go butting in to any little game that happens to be in progress in the smoke-room. The ship crowd naturally do not go to the Captain or the Purser and complain that there is an unauthorized gang on board eating into their profits. The case is settled out of

Reprinted by permission of Brandt & Brandt; originally titled "The Buoy That Did Not Light."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

court; and when you've real bad men traveling . . . Well, I've seen some curious things.

"There was a fellow, quite unknown to me except from hearsay, named Doyle. He was a land man in a big way. Banks and bullion trains were his specialty, but there was hardly a piece of work he couldn't do if there was money in it.

"If he'd kept to land work, where by all accounts he was an artist, he'd have stayed lucky. But you can't properly work both. I've had that from some of the biggest men that ever traveled the sea. What my old skippers called. 'The Barons of the Nimble Pack' work in a perfectly straightforward manner. All they need is a pair of hands, a pack of cards, a glib tongue, and a sucker. Sometimes they use more packs than one, but there is no fanciful apparatus, no plots and plannings, guns, masks, or nitroglycerine. It's a profession like doctoring or lawyering—peaceful and, in a manner of speaking, inoffensive.

"When a land crowd comes barging into the smoke-room they're treated civilly so long as they're traveling for pleasure. Otherwise . . . Well, it's natural. If you're poaching a stream you don't want people throwing bricks into it. There's only one sensible way of being unlawful when you're poaching, and that is to poach.

"I've seen a bit of amphibian work and I'm telling you I don't want to see any more. I remember one year we went out of Southampton with a full passenger list, the date being the 21st of December, and we carried to all appearance as nice a passenger list as you could wish to meet. Mostly Americans going home, though there was a fair sprinkling of British.

"We had a couple of genteel gangs on board—fellows who never played high or tried for big stakes, but managed to make a reasonable living. Tad Hesty of Pittsburgh ran one, and a London fellow named Lew Buckley managed the other. A very nice, sensible fellow was Lew, polite and gentlemanly, and I've never heard a complaint against him, though I've traveled a score of voyages with him.

"'Felix,' he said to me one day, 'moderation in all things is my motto. Nobody was ever ruined by taking small profits. A man who loses a hundred dollars doesn't squeal. Touch him for a thousand, and the pilot boat comes out looking like an excursion steamer, it's that full of bulls. A hundred dollars is speechless, Felix. It may give a tiny squeak, but it apologizes immediately afterwards. A thousand dollars has a steam siren, and ten thousand dollars makes a noise like a bomb.'

"He and his two friends used to share the same cabin. One was always dressed quiet and respectable, and never went into the smoke-room at all. He used to sit up on

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the deck, reading a book and getting acquainted with the serious-minded people from the Middle West, or the North of England mill-owners who think they're sporty because they own a couple of greyhounds that get into the second round of the Waterloo Cup.

"Lew was on very good terms with the Pittsburgh crowd, and I've seen them drinking together and exchanging views about the slackness of trade and the income tax and things of that kind, without any ill word passing between them.

"A ship isn't out of port twenty-four hours before a steward knows the history of everybody on board; and the smoke-room steward told me that there was nobody else on board but the Pittsburgh crowd and this man Buckley and his friends. In fact, it looked so much like being a quiet voyage that only the little cards warning passengers not to play cards with strangers were put up in the smoke-room. If the Flack gang had been traveling, we'd have put up the usual warnings, with four-inch type.

"I had eight staterooms to look after—Numbers 181 to 188, F. Deck. A Chicago man had one; a Mr. Mellish, who was a buyer at a St. Louis store, was another; a young English officer—Captain Fairburn—attached to the British Embassy had another; and the remainder were booked by Colonel Roger Parkson for his party. There was the Colonel, a tall, solemn-looking man; his wife, who was younger than him, and always seemed to be crying in her cabin; his son, a slick young fellow, generally dressed to kill; and there was Miss Colport.

"Personally, I don't take much notice of a passenger's personal appearance. I judge 'em by their hair brushes. There's woodens—generally missionaries or fellows like reporters, whose passage is paid by somebody else; there's ivory backs and silver backs and horn backs, with now and again a gold back. Gold backs are usually on their honeymoon.

"I can't remember whether this Miss Colport was an ivory or a silver. Maybe she was silver, for she was Parkson's secretary and he'd hired her in London, where she was stranded and anxious to get home. Not that she had any friends in New York. By all accounts she came from the west and went to London to take up a position as stenographer to an uncle, who first went broke in the rubber slump and then died.

"I knew she was a good-looker long before I saw the trouble she was making with the British Embassy. Captain Fairburn used to be up hours before breakfast waiting for her on deck. Whether they knew or did not know one another before they came on board, I can't say. I should think not. On board ship you get an introduction from the after combing, as they say. The

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Colonel and his son had breakfast in bed the first day, for the *Beramic* is a cow of a ship, and she'd roll in a saucerful of milk.

"Anyway, somebody must have given them the word that their young lady secretary was getting acquainted with the British Army, for the second morning out young Parkson—Jules by name—told me to call him at seven. And about five minutes after he'd climbed to the upper deck Miss Colport came down, looking very pink in the face and not a bit pleased.

"Jules was mad about the girl. Used to follow her about like a tame cat or a wild tiger, whichever way you look at it. What first got me thinking was a bit of a conversation I heard between him and his father one afternoon when I was polishing the brasses in the alleyway.

"'I've got a few words to say to you, Jules,' said the Colonel. He had a growling, complaining voice at the best of times, but now it was like a file on granite. 'If you get any pleasure out of making up to that girl, you're entitled to get it, so long as you're not too serious. I'll do all the serious stuff in that quarter.'

"'She'll skip to Denver as soon as she lands,' said Jules sulkily. And something in his voice told me that they were not father and son. I don't know what it was, but I jumped to that conclusion and I was right.

"I heard the Colonel laugh, and it was the sort of laugh that has a bark to it.

"'Have I paid her passage to New York to have her skip anywhere?' he asked. 'She's going to be very useful. Min's getting past her work. Colport is the woman I've been looking for . . .'

"That's all I heard, but I knew that 'Min' was Mrs. Roger Parkson, because I'd heard him call her that lots of times. I had a good look at her after that. She was a woman just over thirty, who used to make up a lot. I began to understand why her eyes were always red and why she was so scared-looking when the Colonel spoke to her. I knew, of course, that she was too young to be the mother of Jules. At first, I thought that she was the Colonel's second wife; now I guessed that none of the three was related. It's a wicked world.

"The next day was Christmas Eve, and some queer things happened. It was in the morning that the desk steward met me and asked me to take Mrs. Parkson's wrap to her.

"I took it up and found them leaning against the rail opposite the smoke-room door. Jules was there, scowling at Captain Fairburn and Miss Colport, who were sitting together, talking.

"Just as I was putting on the lady's wrap, Lew Buckley came out of the smoke-room. I was standing behind the lady, looking over her shoulder, and I caught one glimpse

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of his face. His expression didn't exactly change as he looked at her. I don't know how I'd describe it . . . I think it must have been his eyes that lit, but he took no further notice and strolled down the deck with his hands in his pockets and his cap on the side of his head.

"'Good God!' said the Colonel. 'I didn't know he was on board.'

"As I fixed the wrap I could feel Mrs. Parkson tremble.

"'He works this line,' she said. 'I told you in London . . .'

"'That will do, steward,' said the Colonel, and I had to go away at a moment when, as you might say, the story was getting interesting.

"It was a heavy day for me, and heavier than I expected, owing to Santa Claus.

"We always do our best to amuse passengers, and on this Christmas Eve a grand fancy-dress ball was arranged, which seemed to be passing off without anything unusual happening. Lew Buckley spent the evening in the smoke-room playing bridge for a dollar a hundred, and the Pittsburgh crowd had got hold of a man in the moving picture business and were listening admiringly to all he was telling them about the way he won four thousand dollars from another fellow. This moving picture man was one of those kind of people you meet on board a ship who are often sober.

"Well, the fancy-dress ball came off, and about eleven o'clock, when people were getting noisy—at what I call the streamer and confetti stage—a Santa Claus with a big sack on his back and a bundle of presents in his hand went along all the alleyways, into every cabin he found open, and left a little cellular doll—celluloid, is it? You can buy them for a penny or two. A little doll without any clothes on except a bit or ribbon, with *Merry Christmas* printed on it. I saw him; lots of other stewards saw him; the Purser saw him and wanted him to have a drink, but no, he said he had a lot to do, and he was right.

"Of course there was trouble in the morning. Nobody who has lost a pearl stickpin or a pair of earrings or a gold watch or a silver cigarette case is going to be satisfied with a two-cent doll in exchange. That old Santa Claus had cleared out every cabin of its valuables, and there were very few people on board who enjoyed their Christmas dinner.

"The fortunate thing, from the stewards' point of view, was that everybody had seen this jolly old gentleman with white whiskers, and one or two had slapped him on the back. They were all anxious now to slap him almost any place, so long as they could lay hands on him. Every steward on board, all the ship's officers, and some of the engineering officers, spent Christmas Day making a thorough and systematic search of all the cabins.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Naturally, the first people to be suspected were the stokehold staff. I say 'naturally' because it is a popular idea among ships' officers that if anything is pinched it is a stoker that did it. Then the third-class saloons were searched, bags and boxes were opened, then finally—and it was the first place they should have looked—they had a tour of inspection of first-class.

"One of the first persons they sent for was Mr. Lew Buckley.

"'Now, Mr. Buckley,' said the Purser, 'you know what happened on the ship last night. I want you to help me. You needn't tell me that you and your friends were playing cards in the smoke-room, and that all your crowd was there, because I know that. Who else is on board?'

"'If I never move from this carpet, Mr. Cole,' said Lew earnestly, 'I have no more idea who did this job than an unborn child. I am not saying,' he went on, 'that if there was a gentleman on board engaged in that kind of business I should give you his name, because my motto is "live and let live." But it so happens that there isn't anybody that I know. When I heard about this you could have knocked me down with a feather,' he said. 'Naturally, it's not to my interest to make people suspicious and tighten up on their wads, and I consider that, from my own point of view, the voyage has been spoiled, and every particle of enjoyment has been taken out of it.'

"'That's all very well,' said the Purser, looking at him hard—I heard all this from Lacey, who does for the Purser—'but there's been a complaint made, and your name has been mentioned by Colonel Parkson. He says he knows that you are a card-man and a dangerous character.'

"Lew shook his head.

"'I don't know the Colonel,' he said, 'except by sight. He's mistaken—it's easy to make mistakes. The first time I saw him I mistook him for a fellow named Doyle that's wanted in London for the London and City Bank affair—they got away with twenty thousand pounds. Tell him that, will you, and apologize to him for my mind harboring such libelous thoughts.'

"Well, on Christmas evening I saw the Colonel talking to young Captain Fairburn at the door of Captain Fairburn's stateroom. They were very friendly and they were both laughing.

"'I'm afraid I shall have to give you a check if I lose any more,' said Captain Fairburn.

"That was all. When he'd gone down to dinner I went into his cabin. He had been playing cards. How they got to be friendly I don't know. You can never keep track of things like that. You see a man and a girl pass without noticing one another the first day out. By the time the Irish coast is out of sight they are meeting on deck at daybreak and getting in the way of the watch

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that has to scrub down. Before they get to Sandy Hook they are receiving congratulations by wireless from their friends and relatives.

"Young Captain Fairburn came in after dinner to get some cigarettes.

"'Excuse me, Captain,' I said, 'but I shouldn't play cards in your stateroom if I were you.'

"'Why not, steward?' he asked, surprised. 'Is it against the rules of the ship?'

"'No, sir,' says I, 'but it's dangerous.'

"'Stuff!' said he. 'I was only playing with Colonel Parkson—you're not suggesting that he is a cardsharp, are you?'

"'No, sir,' I says. When people start asking me if I'm suggesting that, I resign. That is why stewards can't help passengers. Passengers know it all. They're men of the world, by gum!

"As soon as I had finished my eight staterooms, I had to join one of the search parties that were hunting through the ship for the lost property. The Purser was still certain that matter must occupy space, and we searched space from the crow's-nest to the bunkers.

"I didn't see or hear anything of what happened in the smoke-room, and I never knew till the next morning that the Colonel and Jules had played cut-throat poker with young Fairburn in full view of the smoke-room, and that Captain Fairburn had lost a lot more than he could afford. In fact, the check he gave was for four figures. The deck steward told me that when they came out on the promenade, he heard the Colonel say to Jules: 'That settles our young friend's matrimonial plans—if he had any.'

"At this moment I was on the boat deck having my second pipe. I was naturally lying doggo—in other words, invisible—not wishing to be seen by any of the ship's officers; and the night being cold, I was wedged between the second officer's cabin and the wireless house.

"From where I sat I had a limited view, and if the couple hadn't stopped right opposite to where I was, I'd have missed everything. But I always have been lucky that way. All that I could hear at first was a woman crying, and somehow I guessed it was 'Mrs. Parkson.' Perhaps it was because she was the only woman I had seen crying since the voyage started.

"But when I heard the man's voice, why, I nearly jumped. It was Lew Buckley.

"'Oh, Lew, I've treated you badly. I don't deserve anything . . .'

"I saw him put his arm round her shoulder, and I knew by the way her sobs were stifled that she was crying on his chest.

"'I bear no ill will, Minnie,' he said. 'I've always said that if you liked Doyle better than me, you were entitled to him, old girl.'

"There was a long silence, and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

then he said, 'He told the Purser that I was in that Father Christmas job. That's the kind of swine Doyle is. Where's the stuff, Min? . . . You needn't tell me. It is in the calcium canister of one of these life buoys. Had it ready planted and painted and substituted it one dark night, eh? It's an old trick of Doyle's.'

"My hair almost stood up. Round all the promenade decks are life buoys hooked to the rail. Attached are cans containing a chemical to light up the moment it touches water. The lid of the canister is jerked off automatically as the life buoy is thrown.

"It was the simplest idea in the world. Doyle had a duplicate life buoy in his cabin baggage. One dark night—probably the first night out—he'd carry it up to the boat deck and put it in the place of another that he'd throw overboard after cutting the cord that opened the calcium tin. He wouldn't have a chance of doing it on the promenade, but the boat deck was dark and easily reached.

"They were talking in low tones and I could only catch an occasional word. Then, just as they were turning to go, I heard her whisper:

" 'There he is!'

"It was the Colonel. I caught a whiff of his cigar before I saw him.

" 'Hullo! That's Lew Buckley, isn't it? Meeting old friends, eh, Min?'

" 'Doyle, I've got a word or two to say to you. The first is business. You've been breaking into our game tonight with that young officer. Tad is pretty mad about it.'

" 'Got a franchise to work the Western Ocean, Lew? What do I have to do—get written permission before I work a ship?'

" 'That's one thing,' said Lew. 'Here's another, and that is business too. You told the Purser that I was in your Santa Claus game.'

" 'He knew all about you,' said the Colonel, and I saw the red end of his cigar gleaming and fading. 'It did you no harm, and testified to my respectability. Anything more?'

"Lew struck a match to light his cigarette, and I saw his face. Saw the woman's too—just for a fraction of a second.

" 'You've got a young girl in your outfit—secretary or something. What's the idea?'

" 'Min's been talking, eh? Jealous. Well, Lew, it's like this: men grow old and it doesn't matter. Looks are not my asset. They are in the case of Min. There's no sense in looking at these things sentimentally. When a card-man loses his fingers he's finished, isn't he? When Min loses her looks . . . Well, be sensible. I can't work with a plain woman. She's got to hook first time, Lew. Isn't that common sense? It's tough on Min, but I'm going to play fair. She's got a big roll coming to her—'

" 'What about the girl? She's a decent young woman,' said Lew.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Doyle laughed again.

"'She's a mighty nice girl, and when she's a little wiser than she is at present . . . Anyway, we're not going to quarrel.'

"I saw the dark figure of Lew. He was leaning back with both his elbows on the rail.

"'I never quarrel with a man who keeps his gun in his hand all the time,' he said, and I think that one struck home, for the Colonel moved kind of startled.

"'Besides,' said Lew, 'I'm not actually in this. Off you go, Min, I want a chat about this Father Christmas notion.'

"He took the arm of the Colonel, and they went for'ard, and I followed Mrs. Parkson down the deck. The first person I went to see was the Purser. I don't want to say anything against the Pursers of the 'Starcuna' Line, but all I can say is that if there's one with the brain of a Napoleon, I've never sailed with him. Our Purser at the time was a man who thought in about five phrases. 'Do nothing precipitate' was one. 'Dereliction of duty' was also a great favorite. I don't know what it means and I'll bet he didn't either.

"'It's an extraordinary story,' he said, 'and I'll report the matter to the Captain first thing in the morning. We must do nothing precipitate. But what were you doing on the boat deck, Jenks, smoking? That was a dereliction of duty. However, we'll wait until the morning. I was certain the missing property would be found. Matter must occupy space.'

"I was so agitated that I went out to the promenade deck and helped the steward on duty stack up the chairs and collect the rugs and the library books. It was getting late, and I spotted Miss Colport and Captain Fairburn very close together and looking over the rail. I suppose the sea was vaster than ever that night, for if they weren't holding hands then I'm inexperienced. I can tell hand-holders a mile off.

"Farther along the deck was Mrs. Parkson and Jules. They were talking together, too, but not so friendly.

"It was late, and some of the bulkhead lights were out. I saw the second officer coming along the deck in his heavy overcoat and sea boots, and at that minute something flashed past the rail.

"I heard the shriek, and then the second officer yelled, '*Man overboard!*'

"He sprang to the rail, lifted up a buoy, and flung it as the *Beramic* heeled over to port and the engines rang astern.

"'The calcium light's not burning,' shouted the second, and, racing along the deck, he flung over a second buoy. It hardly touched the water before it burst into a green flame.

"'That works all right—but what in hell was wrong with the other?' asked the second officer.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"The *Beramic* was moving in a slow circle, and the watch had the fore lifeboat into the water in double-quick time. The deck was crowded now. The passengers had flocked out of the main saloon and the smoke-room, and were crowding up the companionway in their dressing gowns. I think it was the 'man boat' signal on the siren that roused 'em. The boat pulled round and reached the second buoy, but the first they never found—nor the man either.

"'What is it, steward?'

"I looked round and saw Mr. Lew Buckley. He was in his pajamas and dressing gown.

"'A man overboard, sir,' I said, 'and they threw him a buoy that had no calcium tank. I think it was Colonel Parkson.'

"'How extraordinary!' said Mr. Lew Buckley.

"The Captain had an inquiry next morning, and I told all that I'd heard. Mr. Buckley said he had never been on the boat deck, and so did Mrs. Parkson. All the life buoys were examined, but none were found that had jewelry in the canister.

"After the inquiry was over, the Captain had a talk with me.

"'Two against one, Jenks,' he said. 'This had better be an accident or a suicide. We don't want this yarn of yours to get into the newspapers, do you understand?'

"'Yes, sir,' I said.

"'And don't smoke on the boat deck, steward. If you want to smoke, come and have a pipe with me on the bridge.'

"A very sarcastic person was the skipper of the *Beramic*.

"I don't think Captain Fairburn was as poor as Parkson thought—even though his check was never presented.

"The reason why I think this is because, when he came back to the *Beramic* about six months later, he had the honeymoon suite, and Mrs. Fairburn—Miss Colport, that was—had the dandiest set of gold-back hair brushes I've ever seen."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* story by STUART CLOETE

first publication in the United States

A beautifully and subtly told story about a young woman who had grown up in Africa and "had seen plenty of things killed," who "had seen cruelty." And later when she had a problem that reminded her of one she'd had as a child—a grownup problem of a man who had injured her—she knew what to do . . . "to let the punishment fit the crime" (W. S. Gilbert's Mikado's Song from THE MIKADO).

THE SECOND NAIL

by STUART CLOETE

AS SOON AS HE HAD BROUGHT THEM she had put them in a crystal vase. You couldn't make flowers wait while you made love. It seemed selfish. That was yesterday. Or was it perhaps last year? How silly could you be? As if flowers would last a year.

An hour ago she had been so happy here. Everything so perfect. But how long ago an hour was! It was almost a lifetime. And now the flat had become strange to her.

She looked about it as if she was seeing it for the first time, and wondering what kind of girl lived here. And the man sitting opposite. Jim Farrow. James Henry Farrow. He had become strange, too. All in an hour.

She crossed her long slim legs, smooth in nylon. She was not one of those girls who did not wear stockings. He had said she had pretty legs—so had other men. It was funny how there were leg-men and bust-men. It was funny to find herself thinking of such things now.

She took a cigarette out of the silver box and lit it from the table lighter. It wasn't often that she lit her own cigarettes when she was with a man. Of course she often did. That wasn't true. But the man half rose and made a forward gesture . . . She blew a smoke ring. You had to be composed to do that.

She was surprised at how composed she was. It wasn't an act. If the life went out of you, you were composed. It was like a candle burning, a bright steady flame. And then someone blew it out. A lot of her candles had been blown out—Mitzi; her parents' death in a plane crash. Other things too. Perhaps life was

© *Stuart Cloete 1966.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

like that, like a birthday cake with the candles being blown out one by one. You relit them but it wasn't ever the same. They didn't burn so bright or so clear.

He was staring out of the window, watching the white clouds race by, driven by the wind like woolly sheep running from a dog.

Words were forming in her mind. In a minute they would come out. She couldn't just sit there in this strange girl's flat blowing smoke rings forever. He couldn't stare out of the window forever.

"So it's over, Jim," she said.

The words had come out. Four words. She wondered how many women had thought them. Said them. Just a tiny trickle of words. Four drops as it were, escaping from the dam of pent-up feeling.

"I suppose so, honey. There's no use making a production of it. After all, we're grown up. Civilized people. And it was fun while it lasted, you must agree."

"Of course," she said. "If you feel that way . . ."

He was very handsome. Dark, square-shouldered, gray eyes, crew cut. The football-playing type who got girls easily. He had a good job and money of his own as well. Quite a catch. But the line was broken. The big one had got away. Not that he'd ever proposed. Not even that she had cared very much about marriage. She had a career of her own. Or had she? Had she expected their friendship to lead to the altar?

"When I was a kid," she said, "I used to go tiger-fishing on the Zambesi with my father."

She saw it all in her mind. The savage strike at the spoon. The fish breaking water. Sometimes they jumped four or five times, their bodies flashing in the sun, and even when you'd hooked them, four out of five got away. Spat the spoon out almost in your face at the side of the boat. One last tremendous leap and out it came. You brought them in with a gaff. Tiger striped with black, tiger-toothed, with a double row of teeth, like a crocodile, that could take a man's finger off neat as a whistle. She felt the heat of Africa. Saw the natives laughing, shining with sweat. Her friends—the only friends of her childhood.

"He was a missionary, wasn't he?" Jim said.

She could see how relieved he was at getting out of it so easily.

"Yes," she said.

"We can go on being friends, of course," he said. "It's just that the zing has gone out of it. The bells don't ring any more."

Wedding bells, orange blossom, and now for whom the bell tolled. For me. If I hadn't let him, she thought. But I loved him. She noticed the past tense she had used in her mind. She looked at him again. He was new, too. Like the flat, like everything. Nothing was ever going to be quite the same again.

Just a big, good-looking man, confident and well nourished. The

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

clean-cut boy in an expensive suit. A dark brown knitted tie. Everything just right. Just so. The kind of man who lighted cigarettes—the right kind, naturally—for the right kind of girls on TV. Girls who used the right hair spray, the right deodorant, wore the right bras, and so on. And after all, why not? That was his business. TV commercials. That was how she had met him.

An idea man, they'd said. Full of ideas, Jim was. And he had a wonderful line with girls. Tender and masterful at the same time. She supposed he had different lines for different girls. Like fishing—with different lures.

But they all took the bait happily. She'd gathered that from his conversation. Not that he bragged about his conquests. Just hints. Coins dropped into the beggar's cap of feminine curiosity. The trick that got them, that she supposed had got her, was the implicit promise of marriage. Implicit though, nothing more.

Then, when he felt he was getting too involved, he broke water and spat out the hook . . .

An hour ago—that was a year ago—they had been making love. How odd of him to want to when it was over. He must have come with the intention of telling her so. So what had made him do it? Habit? Perhaps it was easier for him than talking. Looking back, there had never been much talk. Just man-woman patter. Office chatter. TV talk. Theaters, shows. Clothes, shops, and so on.

She rose and smiled down at him.

"I understand Jim," she said. "No production. It's just the way the game goes, isn't it?"

"That's right. I'm glad you see it that way."

Did he really think she saw it that way? Did men ever learn anything about women? She smoothed her dress over her hips and went over to smell the carnations, standing with her back to him.

"Of course we'll be friends, Jim," she said. "Having been so much more only an hour ago—" she felt she had to remind him—"we could hardly be less, could we?"

She stubbed out her cigarette. The end, red-tipped with lipstick, fascinated her. It's like blood, she thought. And why not? If you were wounded, you bled.

Turning to face him she said, "Excuse me a moment. I'll go and make some coffee."

"Of course," he said. "I'd like a cup."

She knew he thought she wanted a few minutes by herself to recover.

Coffee always rang a bell with him. How one kept using the same words! Bells, wedding, tolling. Cowbells in the bush. He had a coffee account. She'd helped him with the jingle. *Coffee for one, coffee for two. Coffee for me, coffee for you . . .*

In the kitchen she filled the cof-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fee pot and switched it on. It was automatic. When the coffee was made it turned itself down. "Smarter than a girl," he had said when he gave it to her. It was one of the prizes people got when they sent in so many Ultra-Plus coffee coupons.

Curiously, the little kitchen had not changed like the bedroom and sitting room. It had never been affected by the miasma of his presence. Time was still normal in here.

Hardly realizing what she was doing, she opened a cupboard and got out a shoe box. In it, like a baby wrapped in a piece of skin, on a cradle of cotton, lay a small wooden figure. Crudely carved, exaggeratedly masculine.

It was more than a year since she had looked at it. She wondered why she had kept it. She wondered why she was looking at it now. Several times she had thought of throwing it away or giving it to a museum. A bit of the African art that was so fashionable today.

Almost in a dream she went to her tool drawer—a woman's drawer, with a screwdriver, a pair of pliers, and a light hammer. She picked a brass carpet nail out of the old face-cream jar full of oddments, thumbtacks, screws.

She got out the figure and picked up the hammer. Now she was no longer herself. She had gone back to Lundi, back to old N'gala, the old witch doctor. With one swift blow she drove the nail home—the second nail. The first one had been driven into the soft wood twelve years ago when she was just eleven.

Leaving the figure on the kitchen table, she put the coffee pot, cream, sugar, cups, and spoons on the tray.

In the sitting room he was waiting for her.

"What were you doing, honey? Repairing something? I heard you hammering. You should have let me do it."

She smiled into his eyes.

"Woman's work," she said sweetly. "I had to do it myself." She poured the coffee.

"I never told you about Mitzi, did I?"

"Who's Mitzi?"

"Mitzi was a kitten I had when we lived at Lundi."

She could read his mind as he settled back in his chair to listen. Another of those damn African stories. But anything was better than a row and she had taken it very well. Better than some of the others. That was one thing about a lady. No shouts. No throwing things. No recriminations.

"I was eleven," she said, "when my mother gave me Mitzi. I was worried about her, because cats don't last in the bush. Snakes, wildcats, leopards."

Staring into the Japanese print on the wall in front of her, she saw it all. The mission station. The great baobab and its dangling fruit that looked like pears covered in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

green plush. She felt the burning heat come up from the ground.

"I loved Mitzi," she said, "and took care of her. She was a very affectionate kitten, always walking about with her tail up the way they do when they are happy."

He nodded his head as if he understood what she meant.

"And then one day," she went on, "Shultz arrived. He was a professional hunter. Killing game because they carried tsetse fly. He left his Jeep and came across the yard to the house. Mitzi went up to him, her tail in the air. She expected him to pick her up. Instead, he kicked her. Lifted her right off the ground as if she was a football. He hadn't seen me. I was behind the big baobab and no one else was about. It was after lunch, in the heat of the day, and I was supposed to be lying down, but preferred being outside. So I saw it happen. I rushed at him and beat him with my fists.

"He said he was sorry. That it was an accident. That he hadn't seen Mitzi. But I knew better.

"I picked Mitzi up and she tried to purr but her back was broken, and she died in my arms."

"Did you tell your father?"

"Oh, no," she said. "I never said a word." Then, because she knew what was in his mind, she said, "Kids brought up in Africa aren't like other kids. Not in the bush anyway. I had seen plenty of things killed. Buck and so on. I had seen cruelty. So I said nothing and Shultz didn't say anything. When my parents asked where Mitzi was I said I didn't know. But I did. I had buried her in the hollow trunk of the baobab and covered her over with stones.

"Did you know most baobabs are hollow, Jim? They aren't proper trees. They aren't wood. Just a kind of enormous vegetable. Perhaps one day someone will find her skeleton covered with rocks when the tree dies. Or I may go back. They live thousands of years, you know, the baobabs, I mean. Daddy said the one by the mission station might have been there since before Christ was born. Imagine that . . .

"Shultz stayed two days, filled up with gas, and went back to his killing. And I went to see my friend, N'gala, the witch doctor. He was very old. A hundred, they said. He might not have been that old, but he was certainly very old and wise. Being a missionary's daughter, I was not supposed to visit him. He was a thorn in Daddy's flesh. Competition, as it were."

At the word "competition," Jim sat up. "I can see that," he said.

"Of course," she went on, "N'gala knew all about it. Not because he was a witch doctor but because every African knew about it. They always know everything that goes on.

"'The heart of the little Inkoosikaas is sore,' he said.

"I said, 'Yes, it is sore.'

"'I am a great doctor,' he said.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

'But I cannot bring the dead to life again.'

" 'I know,' I said, the tears beginning to run down my cheeks.

" 'Yet I can do something, Inkoosikaas. I have done something, for I expected you. Is it not to me you always come when you need advice and help?'

"It was true, I did. I loved the old man. He crawled into his hut and came out with a little carved figure of a man, the kind my father hated. Indecent. Also a small ax and a rusty nail. He laid them down on the ground in front of me.

" 'Now,' he said. 'Do you wish to kill this man?'

" 'No,' I said, 'Just to hurt him.'

" 'Very well then,' he said. 'He kicked your cat with his foot. He kicks kaffirs with his foot. We call him Tilawa, the man who kicks. Therefore let us end this kicking.'

"He held the nail over the right leg of the figure, just above the knee, and gave me the little ax. An ax, as you know, has a blunt end like a hammer.

" 'Strike, Inkoosikaas!' he said.

"And I struck.

"The old man was quite still for a while. Then he wrapped the figure up in a piece of skin and gave it to me.

" 'Keep it,' he said, 'and use it as I have today if you are injured by a man. But think first, little missie, do not hurt people for nothing.' "

"Well, and what happened after that?" Jim asked.

"What happened? I'll tell you. A week later his boys brought Shultz back. A wounded lioness had charged him and bitten his right leg clean through. My father had to amputate it."

"What a coincidence!" Jim said. "That's the kind of thing that makes people believe in things like witchcraft, and so on. There's a coincidence and they swallow it all, hook, line, and sinker. What did you do with the little figure when you left Africa? Throw it away?"

"Oh, no. I didn't throw it away, Jim, I've got it still."

She got up and went to the kitchen, slim and slight as a boy.

"Look!" she said when she came back holding up the small, rather dirty little carving.

She handed it to him. He raised his hand as he took it as if he expected it to be heavier.

"There's the first nail, Jim. In the right leg."

"There are two nails now," he said, "and the second one's in—"

"Yes, there are two now. Didn't you hear me hammering?"

Jim dropped the little figure on the gray carpet as if it had stung him. He gave an uneasy laugh.

She looked at him curiously. It was hard to believe she had ever loved this man.

"You see," she said. "I don't want you to do what you did with me to any other girls."

"What rubbish! You don't really believe in it, do you?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"In what? In my juju? I don't really know, but it worked with Shultz, didn't it?"

"It's just auto-suggestion, like all witchcraft." His voice was uneasy. "Accidents like that are bound to happen to hunters. But I suppose that was why you wanted me to see it. I mean if I hadn't seen it . . ."

"It wouldn't have worked? And now that you have, it may? Perhaps, Jim. After all, you'll soon find out, won't you? Next time you go home with a girl . . ."

She got up from the sofa in one motion, uncurling like a snake about to strike—a slim, blonde snake—and handed him his hat.

CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE HARDCOVERS

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PRICE	ON SALE
Carr, John Dickson	DARK OF THE MOON	Harper & Row	$5.95	12/6
Davies, L. P.	THE RELUCTANT MEDIUM	Doubleday	3.95	12/1
Mans, Adrienne	ON THE SHORES OF NIGHT	Walker & Co.	3.95	12/11
Rowan, Richard Wilmer with Deindorfer, Robert	SECRET SERVICE	Hawthorn Books	40.00	12/1
Treat, Lawrence (editor)	MURDER IN MIND	E. P. Dutton	4.50	11/13
Walsh, John	POE THE DETECTIVE: The Curious Circumstances Behind the Mystery of Marie Roget	Rutgers Univ. Press	7.50	12/1
Watson, Colin	COFFIN, SCARCELY USED	G. P. Putnam's	3.95	12/18
Wells, Tobias	DEAD BY THE LIGHT OF THE MOON	Doubleday	3.95	12/1
White, Lionel	THE NIGHT OF THE RAPE	E. P. Dutton	3.95	12/4

CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE PAPERBACKS

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PRICE	ON SALE
Block, Lawrence	TANNER'S TWELVE SWINGERS	Gold Medal (Orig.)	.50	11/30
Ford, Leslie	HONOLULU MURDERS	Popular Library	.60	12/5
Frome, David	MR. PINKERTON GROWS A BEARD	Popular Library	.60	12/19
Marlowe, Dan J. and Odel, William	THE RAVEN IS A BLOOD RED BIRD	Gold Medal (Orig.)	.50	11/30
Runyan, Charles	THE BLACK MOTH	Gold Medal (Orig.)	.50	11/30

Titles and Data Supplied by the Publishers

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

For Davy Knowles it was almost a wasted summer. Then his friend Tom Hasker got this big idea. No small-time caper like stealing hub caps. No, this was the big chance—Davy's big chance to get a car of his own and girls like the blonde at the Star Drug Store and, perhaps most important, freedom from his father and mother . . .

FIRST OFFENSE

by STEPHEN DENTINGER

DAVY KNOWLES HAD SPENT MOST of the summer hanging around the Star Drug Store, playing the pinball machine and talking to the new blonde behind the lunch counter. He had one more year of high school, one more year of dozing in class and smoking during the lunch hour and chasing around town in Tom Hasker's convertible. Sometimes he wondered if it was worth it. He wondered especially if it was worth the nightly battles with his father and the crying scenes with his mother.

"How are things, Davy?"

He looked up from the pinball machine and nodded to Tom, who had taken to arriving at the Star Drug earlier in the day since the blonde had started to work there. "What say?"

It was a dull Saturday morning, and both had had dates the night before with high school girls they didn't particularly care about. For Davy, without a car, it had ended with the familiar stroll home from the movie, with a few unsatisfactory kisses in the doorway of the girl's home.

"Date last night?" Tom Hasker asked him, his eyes already on the blonde as she bent over for a jug of soft-drink syrup.

"Yeah." Davy stuck another coin into the machine, not wanting to hear about Tom's conquests.

"Me too. With Barb. We parked down by the lake. Man, she's really something!" He lit a cigarette and lounged against the lunch counter. "What you need is a car, Davy. You're missing all the action."

"Yeah."

"Folks still won't let you have one?"

Davy didn't answer. The subject had come up again the previous evening, with the usual results. His father had shouted and his mother had wept. It had been like that ever since his older brother had stepped on a land mine halfway around the world and died in a war that Davy didn't understand. That had happened a year ago, and his parents hadn't been the same since.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Tom Hasker ordered a Coke from the blonde girl, giving her a special look. "Ever think about just taking off, Davy?"

"If I had the money I damn well would."

"Even before you finished school?"

"Tomorrow, if I had the money." And he meant it.

"Come on, let's go for a ride."

Davy finished his game and followed Tom Hasker out to the street. He was only seventeen, a year younger than Tom, and he knew he lacked the other's assured swagger and casual manner with girls. His face had too many pimples still, and his dark brown hair never seemed to fall quite the right way. It was only in Tom's company that he began to feel the sense of wild freedom that he was certain went along with adulthood.

The top was down on Tom's car, and they pulled out of the parking lot with a roaring surge of power that caused bystanders to turn and stare. This was the part Davy always liked—the feeling of motion, of the wind in your hair and maybe a girl at your side. It was what life was all about.

"How'd you like to make some money?" Tom asked after a while, driving easily with one hand on the wheel. "Enough so's you could leave this town and not bother with finishing school or that jazz."

"You mean stealing hub caps?" Davy asked with a snort.

"This is no hub-cap deal. Does twenty-five thousand bucks sound like hub caps?"

"Twenty-five—"

"You heard me. Twenty-five thousand, split down the middle. With that much you could get yourself a car and take off for New York."

Davy's heart was pounding with excitement. "What do we have to do—rob a bank?"

"That's it, exactly."

"You're nuts!"

Tom slowed the car to a stop at the curb. "If you think so, you'd better get out here."

"Rob a *bank?*"

"Not really a bank. Not inside, anyway. Sort of outside. It's the easiest job in the world. We just walk away with the dough. No tools, no alarms, no guards, no nothing."

"That's a Federal rap, Tom. Hell, I'm not getting mixed up in that!"

Tom Hasker lit another cigarette. "Think it over, Davy. Think it over till tomorrow. Maybe you'll change your mind."

All the way home Davy thought it over—not really seriously, because he still doubted that Tom was serious, but with that half a mind reserved for daydreams and impossible quests.

To get away, to be gone from that house where only the gloomy memory of a brother's death lived now among the everyday treasures of a lifetime. To get away . . .

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

After supper he walked down to the drug store and waited for the blonde girl to finish work. If only he could offer her a ride home, drive down to the lake and neck with her under the stars . . . But he had no car, and someone else was there waiting. A neighborhood fellow with a fancy sports car.

What was it? Was his father afraid he'd smash the thing up and be dead like his only brother? Did they think they could keep him alive and innocent by keeping him on foot? He thought some more about Tom's scheme. Maybe he could just listen to it, and then decide. Just listening to it wouldn't commit him to anything . . .

Sunday morning he told his parents he was going to church, but instead he went over to Tom's house, where he found the older boy washing his car.

"Hi, Davy. Change your mind?"

"Not really. Just tell me some more about it."

"I'll do better than that. I'll show you. Hop in."

They drove over to a shopping center about three miles away, and Tom parked in the large empty lot.

"Is this it?" Davy asked.

"Take a look. What do you see?"

"Nothing. Just an empty lot."

"Look again. See that branch bank?"

Davy stared through the spotless windshield at the low Colonial brick building near the street. "That one?"

"That one. I've got everything planned to the split second, just like we were in the army."

Davy nodded. He knew he'd never be in the real army. There was some sort of regulation about sole surviving sons being exempt from the draft. Sometimes his father reminded him of that, as if his brother's death had been partly Davy's doing. "Tell me about it," he heard himself say.

"This broad I've been taking out —Barb. She works in the bank and she got talking one night. She told me all about it. See that little auto teller unit over the other side of the parking lot? That's so people can do their banking without leaving their car. Two girl tellers are in that thing all day long."

"But they're protected, Tom. They got thick glass and everything."

"Sure they have! And there's even a pneumatic tube connecting the auto teller unit with the bank, so they can shoot money back and forth."

"Then how—?"

"Listen, will you? Every morning the two girl tellers come out the back door of the bank and walk across the parking lot to the auto teller. Nine o'clock sharp! We'll come out tomorrow and I'll show you. The money they'll need for the day is sent to them through the tubes—except on Friday mornings."

"What happens on Fridays?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"They need lots of cash for payroll checks. And most of it's bundled for easy handling. The bundles are too big to fit in the tubes, so the girls carry it to the unit in sacks. No guards, no guns, no nothing. Just two girls with sacks full of money. Barb says they take twenty-five thousand out every Friday morning for the payroll checks."

"Doesn't one of the men watch them?"

Tom shook his head. "They used to have a guard go along with them, but nothing ever happened, so they stopped. If they only knew! The whole thing'll take about ten seconds and we'll be gone." Then, "How about it?"

Davy looked down at his hands. "I—I don't know."

"We'll pack some clothes and leave them in the car. We'll just take off."

"The cops'll be watching for the car."

"So maybe we'll use another one. I'll rent one, and then we'll switch to mine later. They won't get us—not before we reach New York with all the money in the world."

"I don't know, Tom. We've never done anything like this."

"You want to waste your life away in this hick town playing that lousy pinball machine? Or you want to get out and live—have girls like that blonde at Star Drug?"

"I—" All right, he decided suddenly. *All right!* "I'll do it, Tom."

"Good. We'll drive out tomorrow morning and take a look at the girls."

On Monday morning it rained, a light drizzle driven by a stiff westerly wind into an unpleasant downpour that emptied the streets. Tom drove the car slowly down Maple Street and turned into the big parking lot, bringing the car to rest by the supermarket at the far end.

"There are the girls," Davy said after a moment. The rear door of the bank had opened and two girls with raincoats over their heads ran out to a waiting car.

"One of the men is driving them over," Tom said. "But usually they walk. They'll be walking on Friday."

"If it doesn't rain."

"It won't. I already checked the weather bureau's five-day forecast. No more rain in sight the rest of this week."

Davy glanced at him. "You think of everything."

"You gotta think of everything. You gotta be watching for the big chance all the time. You know what cops look like—detectives?"

"Big guys with big feet."

"Sometimes. Sometimes not. The F.B.I. agents are usually younger and more ordinary-looking. And the secret service, when they're walking with the President, always have their coats open so they can draw their guns."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Yeah?" Davy knew that Tom could teach him a great deal. He thought of how things would be for them in New York, with all that money. They'd get girls right away, and move into some swell apartment, and maybe after a while get jobs somewhere. But not right away.

"That's enough for today," Tom said. "We'll check it again on Thursday and run through the whole plan."

"Is one of those girls Barb?" Davy asked suddenly, because he'd just thought of it.

"No. She works inside. Neither of these ever laid eyes on us. Anyway, we'll have handkerchiefs over the bottom of our faces, like in the Western movies."

"Everything but guns, huh?" Davy said with a laugh.

Tom Hasker didn't reply.

The blonde in the drug store called herself Candy, and by Wednesday afternoon Davy had worked up the courage to ask her for a date. "A movie, maybe? Tonight?"

She eyed him uncertainly while washing glasses. "You don't have a car, do you?"

"We could go close by. Maybe tonight, after you finish work."

"Tonight! Heavens, no! I only date on week-ends."

"Oh." He didn't know where he'd be on Friday night. "Well, I'll ask you again."

She smiled and went back to the glasses. He strolled over to the pinball machine but decided he didn't really want to play it. He didn't want to do much of anything, except get away, far away.

On Thursday morning they parked on the street and watched the two young girls—one blonde, the other a lively redhead—prancing across the asphalt lot to the auto teller unit. "I like that redhead," Tom remarked. "Maybe when we hold them up we should just say, 'Your money or your honor!' and let them choose."

He laughed, then noticed that Davy was frowning. Davy asked, "What do you mean, hold them up? I thought we were just going to grab the dough and scram."

Tom reached over to open the glove compartment. "You grab the dough. I'll just show them this to give them a little scare."

"Tom!"

It was a blue-steel revolver with worn grips and a look of hard usage. "Don't worry. It's not loaded," Tom said, trying to reassure him.

"But—where did you get it?"

"I found it. With my father's things." Tom's father, a plant guard at a local factory, had died of a heart attack the previous year.

"You didn't tell me anything about a gun!"

"So I'm telling you now. It's just to scare them."

Davy could feel his heart pounding, feel the empty yawning of his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

stomach. Somehow the fact of the robbery hadn't seemed real until that moment. "No," he said.

"What difference does an empty gun make? Maybe I won't even use it."

"Promise you won't. Promise, or I'm out."

Tom looked at him steadily. "You're in, Davy. It's too late to be out now."

"All right, I'm in! But no gun!"

"I'll have it with me. I promise I won't use it unless I have to."

Davy had to be content with that. He stared grimly through the windshield, watching the girls as they unlocked the auto teller unit and went inside.

Tomorrow. So soon—tomorrow.

Davy didn't sleep well that night. He tossed in the humid darkness and thought about it—his last time in this bed, in this house. What would New York be like? What would the girls be like there? Were they all like in the magazines, with short skirts and big smiles, posing against traffic signs in the latest fashions?

He got out of bed early, at the first hint of daylight, and took a shower. He went over again in his mind the plan that Tom had outlined the night before, picturing the details as they would take place. It was a good plan—foolproof.

Tom would use a rented car and park it near the exit. Then he would follow the girls from the bank, while Davy approached from the other direction. The whole thing would take less than a minute. He wondered abstractedly, as he had before, whether Tom had told the girl, Barb, what he planned. But that didn't really matter. They'd be far away before she or anyone could spread the alarm.

He mumbled something to his mother at breakfast, trying to avoid a conversation. "Really, Davy, the summer's almost gone and you don't have a job or anything. I wouldn't mind so much if you were going to summer school and learning something."

"I'm learning," he answered, his mouth full of toast.

"Where? At the Star Drug? And I want you staying away from those girls around there, you hear? They're nothing but—"

He got up and left the table, not hearing any more of it. After today he'd never have to listen to any more of it.

Already the day was warming, and he knew as he hurried along the sidewalk that by noon the temperature would hit ninety. There'd be one more visit home, to pick up the overnight bag he'd carefully packed the night before and hidden in his room. Then, away. While Davy was getting the bag, Tom would abandon the rented car somewhere and they'd meet again at the convertible, which would be parked near the high school stadium.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Easy. A cinch. Foolproof.

But his heart was beating fast when he neared the bank. He felt in his pocket for the handkerchief he'd use as a mask, glanced around for a sign of Tom and the rented car.

Did they rent cars to eighteen-year-olds that easily? And this early in the morning? And wouldn't Tom have to make a deposit on it?

As he turned it over in his mind, Davy knew suddenly and clearly that Tom had no intention of renting a car. The car would be stolen, as would the money. He wondered why the sudden realization bothered him somehow.

A horn honked, and he turned to see Tom at the wheel of a green sedan, passing him and pulling into the parking area behind the bank. The time was 8:46.

Davy walked past the car and nodded slightly to Tom. There was no need to speak—they both knew what had to be done.

At exactly five minutes to nine Tom left the car by the lot exit and walked around to the front of the bank. He was wearing a jacket despite the heat, and Davy could see the sagging of the gun in its right-hand pocket.

Then Tom disappeared around the back of the bank and Davy started walking across the parking lot, very slowly, with plenty of room between himself and the auto teller unit. The rear door of the bank opened, and the same two girls appeared, each carrying a white canvas sack.

Davy's legs were beginning to tremble, but he kept on walking, gauging his speed by the girls'. He saw Tom round the corner of the bank building and start after them, pulling a handkerchief from his pocket.

It was the lively redheaded girl who happened to turn and see Tom, when they'd covered half the distance to the auto teller unit. She gasped something and put a sudden hand to her mouth.

His face already masked by the handkerchief, Tom pulled the blue-steel revolver from his jacket pocket and pointed it at the two girls. "The money!" he barked out.

Davy started to run toward them, forgetting his own handkerchief in the excitement. The two girls stood as if petrified, still holding their bags of currency as they faced the gun in Tom's hand.

Then came the sudden crack of a pistol shot, and for a split second Davy thought that Tom had fired at the girls. He thought it until he saw Tom start to fold and crumple like an autumn leaf. Then he saw the bank manager in the doorway the girls had just left; the manager was holding a smoking gun in his hand.

Tom Hasker was dead by the time the ambulance arrived. He died without speaking, though in the final instant of life his eyelids

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

might have flickered toward Davy, who stood above him with the others, trying not to see the bloody pool forming on the asphalt.

"Just a kid," the bank manager said, his voice barely a whisper. "Just a kid and I killed him."

"He was trying to rob you, wasn't he?" one of the officers said. "Don't let it worry you." Then he turned to Davy once more. "What about this kid?"

"He was trying to help us," the redhaired girl volunteered. "He came running up when the other one drew his gun."

They questioned Davy for a time and then released him. He looked around for the girl, to thank her, but both girls had already been sent home by the manager.

Davy headed for home, walking quickly in the heat but not even noticing it, thinking only of Tom dying there in the parking lot for a crazy dream that could never come true. He wondered what would happen when the police found out that Tom had been a friend of his.

He remembered Tom's car, parked at the high school stadium, and headed for it, not knowing exactly what he intended to do. When he reached it, standing alone in the noonday heat, he found that it was locked. Tom had a small suitcase in the back seat, and there was another suitcase on the floor, almost out of sight. It looked like a girl's week-end bag.

"Hello," a voice said behind him, very softly.

He turned, startled, the fear building in him once more, and saw that it was the redhaired girl from the bank, the one who had gotten him off. "I—What are you doing here?"

She smiled at him, at his confusion, perhaps at his fear. "I'm Barb. I was Tom's girl. That didn't work out so well this morning. But don't worry, we'll do better next time. Won't we?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EARLIEST PROFILE

Voltaire (in ZADIG*) was the Great-Grandfather of the Detective Story. François Eugène Vidocq (in his* MEMOIRES*) was the Grandfather of the Detective Story. Edgar Allan Poe (in his C. Auguste Dupin stories) was the Father of the Detective Story, and the first tale of Dupin, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," was the world's first detective story in a modern sense.*

But there are "firsts" within "firsts." For examples: the first "locked room" made its modern debut in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue"; the first modern use of psychological deduction and of "double bluff" made their bow in "The Purloined Letter." And now, in this newest Poe pastiche by Michael Harrison, we give you another "first"—the "first example" of a particular detective-story gimmick . . . with, to use a word that has acquired a peculiarly French connotation, a "difference" . . .

THE MURDER IN THE RUE ROYALE

another "hitherto unpublished" tale of C. Auguste Dupin

by MICHAEL HARRISON

THE MURDER OF MONSIEUR CUvillier-Millot, the eminent banker, in his bedroom in the Rue Royale, caused what the newspapers are always pleased to call "a profound sensation." Even in a capital city which, as our friend G—— would assure you, has the oldest and most efficient police in the world, crimes are still numerous, and murders not unknown.

Yet the *bizarre* character of this particular crime gave it, as it were, a *permanence* in the public consciousness which prevented its passing out of the public memory within the traditional period of nine days. All murder is, to a greater or lesser degree, a problem for those who are not killed; but this murder of Monsieur Cuvillier-Millot posed problems over and above those customarily inseparable from the violent taking of another's life.

For instance, how, in this case, did the murderer make his escape, from a window on the second floor, literally within seconds of his having fired the one shot which killed the well-known banker? Moreover,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

how had the assassin made his escape with such miraculous speed that those who forced open the door of the bedroom never caught a glimpse of him?

There were other puzzling features, of course, but these two questions were universally held to be the crucial ones compared with which all others were trifling. One might almost have dismissed the idea that there had been a murderer at all, save that there was a very real corpse in evidence, lying in Monsieur Cuvillier-Millot's four-poster bed, and that the bullet-wound in the back of the corpse's neck could hardly have been self-inflicted. (Were it even possible to suppose that, where then was the pistol which the deceased must have fired in the act of *felo-de-se?*)

The more one reflected upon the many puzzling features of this extraordinary crime, the more puzzling it appeared. The police, though promising a "speedy arrest," within twenty-four hours, as is usual in all cases where the murderer—or, at least, a promising suspect—is not safely lodged in the *Dépôt de la Préfecture de Police,* were obviously baffled. They could scarcely hunt for a suspect among the known burglars of Paris—nothing had been taken from the bedroom of Monsieur Cuvillier-Millot; and though it might have been argued that the thief (supposing the assassin to have been a thief) had been scared off before he had time to rob the banker, surely he had time to snatch up the valuables in plain sight—diamond ring, Bréguet watch and guard, diamond scarf-pin, and a liberally-stuffed pocket-book—which were lying on a dressing-table near the bed.

Then, as to motive, the only person—apart from a hypothetical burglar—who could conceivably have had an interest in the death of the banker was his nephew and presumed heir, who lived with Monsieur Cuvillier-Millot and who, indeed, had played a leading part in the events immediately preceding the discovery of his uncle's dead body. The deceased banker, a widower whose only son had been killed in the Algerian fighting, had sent to London for his sole nephew, the son of a Cuvillier-Millot who had fled to England during the Terror of '93, and, save for fleeting visits to his far wealthier brother in Paris, had never returned to the land of his birth. Gaspard Cuvillier-Millot, heir to the immense fortune of his murdered uncle, had attended one of those English schools which, removing to France after the Reformation, had returned to England more than two centuries later because of the troubles into which the Revolution of 1789 had plunged France.

Following a few terms at Oxford, young Monsieur Gaspard accepted a clerkship in the renowned banking-house of Herries, Farquhar & Co., of St. James's Street, London—a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

move not uncalculated, one felt, to bring him to the sympathetic notice of his prosperous Parisian uncle. In the London banking-house, whose circular and transferable exchange-notes have made it famous and influential throughout Europe, Monsieur Gaspard served with diligence, until the death of his cousin in a skirmish at Tlemcen brought him to Paris, to take the place of that son whom the banker had lost in military action.

So much of the history of this fortunate young man we owed to G——, the Prefect of the Parisian police, who called on us just after breakfast two days after the murder which had set all Paris by the ears. Now, on this sunless Spring morning of the year 183-, G—— sat in our little back library, or book-closet, *au troisième*, No. 33, Rue Dunôt, Faubourg St. Germain, sipped at his hot chocolate, and gave, generally, the impression of a man at his wits' end.

"When a banker is murdered," said G——, harshly peremptory in tone, as he always was when baffled and filled with anxiety for his reputation and his lucrative appointment under the Government, "it involves a good deal more than his mere family. The repercussions on the Bourses of all the capitals of Europe —well, you understand me perfectly, I am sure, my dear Chevalier?"

"Yes, yes, I understand well," replied Dupin, stifling a yawn, for we had sat up late the night before. "Monsieur Cuvillier-Millot had just floated a loan for Brazil of eight million gold francs, another for New Granada of two million, another for Turkey of twenty million, and was about to raise one for Spain of thirty millions, to provide the Iberian Peninsula with a railroad system. Yes, I read the newspapers, too."

"You will know, then," said G., in no wise abashed by my friend's curt manner, "that we are also too near to the social unrest of 1830 and 1832 not to feel alarmed when some thing—any thing—casts doubt upon the stability of the *régime* under which we live. Two French Revolutions in less than fifty years are enough—but there are always Radical newspapers and irresponsible demagogues to raise the cry of corruption whenever some thing happens in the world of banking."

"I am well aware of this," said Dupin, reaching out for the heavy pewter tobacco-jar in which he kept his favorite Latakia. "As I am well aware," he added, beginning to fill his meerschaum pipe, "that you have come to ask my assistance in this matter because your own methods have not produced the hoped-for results. Very well, then: tell me what your own methods have yielded thus far."

"Very little, I am afraid," said G—— candidly. "We have ascertained the cause of death—that goes without saying—"

"Indeed!" observed Dupin,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

though with a strong hint of sarcasm in his intonation. He puffed furiously at his pipe, so that it was almost as if from within a cloud that we heard his voice ask, with a deceptive mildness, "And what, pray, was the cause of Monsieur Cuvillier-Millot's death?"

"Why, it was in all the newspapers—"

"I am not concerned with what the newspapers print, or with what I read in their columns. I am asking *you*. What was the cause of the banker's death?"

"Why, a pistol-shot fired into the base of the skull."

"You have recovered the ball?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Well now, Dupin, why should we have probed for the ball? It was evident beyond doubt what had killed the banker."

"You mean, by that remark, that the usual *sequelæ* of a pistol-shot were present—powder-burns around the wound, blackening of the skin surrounding the point of entry of the ball, and so on?"

"Precisely," replied G., with a little grimace of self-satisfaction and self-congratulation.

"There has been no *post-mortem* examination of the cadaver?"

"*Que diable,* Dupin! Of course not. Where the cause of death is so self-evident, why on earth should we offend both the living and the dead by anatomizing the corpse? I tell you, the man died of a bullet-wound in the top of his spinal column, immediately under the cerebellum—*here!*" And suiting the action to the word, G—— bent his head forward and placed the index finger of his right hand on the spot indicated, a half-inch or so above the upper edge of his tall, starched neckcloth. "In such a place, a bullet-wound is, as you well know, inevitably fatal."

"In such a confoundedly difficult place against which to place the muzzle of a pistol, common justice would hardly deny the assassin the reward of a fatal assault. But tell me, my dear G., what was the eminent victim doing all this time that the assassin was getting behind him? Was the shot in the back of the neck accidentally aimed there? Was the wound the result of a *ricochet?* Or —stay!—was the victim perhaps asleep at the time?"

"No," said G——, with a vigorous shake of his head, "that is impossible. It was the noise of voices raised in some altercation which brought the members of the household—I should say, rather, the *other* members of the household—hurrying toward the door of Monsieur Cuvillier-Millot's bedroom—only, of course, to find it locked, so that the door had to be forced. It was while they were standing outside, debating what to do, that the fatal shot was heard. The door was then attacked vigorously by a couple of footmen—well-built farmer lads from Normandy—and broken open.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Their master was lying on his bed —a corpse—and the assassin was nowhere to be seen."

"And the window, you say, was open?"

"With the dimity curtains blowing in—the heavy drapes had been pulled back. On entering the room of death, some hurried to see what might be done for the victim, others ran to the window. But, scan the surrounding courtyards and streets as they would, they saw no sign of any one who might have escaped from the bedroom, after having murdered their master. And that, Dupin, is what makes the whole affair so very mysterious."

"What, precisely, makes this affair so very mysterious? Are you referring to the fact that, on looking through an open window, no one was seen? I find that possibly the least mysterious fact of all. Now," as he saw that G—— was about to protest, "let us consider this matter of the fatal shot, as you call it—"

"As *I* call it!"

"As you call it. Whatever you and your colleagues may have surmised, it is still to be proven that the fatal shot was heard—or, rather, that what was heard was the fatal shot."

"But a shot *was* heard. We have a dozen witnesses to depose to that fact."

"Possibly. Possibly not. A dozen witnesses may be as wrong as one. Suppose now that *you* tell *me* what it was these twelve witnesses claim to have heard?"

"Well, let us begin somewhat farther back. I shall briefly mention that it is Monsieur Gaspard's custom to rise earlier than the time at which his uncle stirs, so that he may be downstairs at his desk a few minutes before the bank opens for business at 8:30 A.M. He does not—at least customarily—look in on his uncle, who is called by his valet at half-past seven, with a tray of chocolate and rolls and a morning newspaper.

"However, as Monsieur Gaspard walked along the corridor on his way to the bathroom—yes, there is a modern bathroom, fitted with all the latest conveniences, even to a patent English contrivance for heating water by gas—on his way to this bathroom, I say, of which he takes good advantage judging by his fastidious appearance, Monsieur Gaspard passed the door of his uncle's bedroom. The door, though of solid mahogany, is not particularly thick, and sounds within the room may be heard by any one in the corridor. Monsieur Gaspard tells me that he has often heard his uncle's snores as he passed the door.

"Now—to-day is Thursday, so that all this would have happened on Tuesday last—on Tuesday, then, something much out of the ordinary occurred. Monsieur Gaspard rose—I forgot to tell you that no servant calls him, he is awakened by a small alarum-clock which stands on his bed-side table—Monsieur Gaspard rose as usual, donned his *robe de*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

chambre, went out into the corridor, and walked along in the direction of the bathroom."

"All precisely as usual?"

"All precisely as usual. But—certainly not as usual—were the sounds coming through the door of his uncle's bedroom—sounds of angry voices, of reproaches, of threats, of I don't-know-what. Monsieur Gaspard stopped at once; he has a natural delicacy in such matters, and hardly relished the thought of listening at his uncle's door—"

"Or of being detected in the act of doing so? No matter. Pray proceed with your narrative, which I find most interesting."

"At any rate, as Monsieur Gaspard listened, he became aware that the altercation sounded as though it were approaching a climax. He could distinguish no words, but it was clear that two men were angry, and one was menacing the other.

"Monsieur Gaspard became alarmed, and ran rather to get advice than to get help. He hurried down stairs, and poured out his story to the old *suisse,* who has been with the household since before the first Revolution."

"You have taken this man's evidence, of course?"

"Yes—and the evidence of all who were in a position to be witnesses. Well, to proceed: the *suisse* expressed the view that all should repair, with the utmost despatch, to the bedroom, and there call out—in case Monsieur Cuvillier-Millot required assistance in repelling any one who was threatening him."

"One moment, please! Why did not Monsieur Gaspard open the door of his uncle's bedroom, and just walk in?"

"He says that he had a nervousness as regards his uncle. The banker was rather a martinet, a domestic tyrant. I can well believe that the nephew may have hesitated to expose himself to the shame of an embarrassing situation. In any case, as was proved later, the door was locked."

"Yes, but he can not say whether or not the bedroom-door was locked when he passed it—or, say, when he halted to listen to the stranger menacing his uncle."

"No, he can not say. I put the question to him, but he could not answer it, one way or the other."

"Hem! So, merely observing that this precious Monsieur Gaspard strikes me as rather a poltroon, let us go on. The *suisse* had no sooner been asked his advice by this far too fastidious nephew than the domestic called for the footmen, and, probably accompanied now by the other servants, led the party to the door of their master's bedroom. Or—stay!—did Monsieur Gaspard, shamed into at least the affectation of resolution, lead the way? Ah, he did lead! Good! And what did the *suisse* and all the domestics have to tell you of the quality of the voices heard through the strong but thin door?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Well now, here we strike a formidable difficulty. I had hoped that we might have some evidence which would help us to trace the assassin through some one's recognition of his voice."

"But now there was only silence? The voices had ceased?"

"Just so."

"The banker was dead—and the assassin had fled through the window?"

"Impossible! Just as Monsieur Gaspard and the footmen were readying themselves to break open the door—I mentioned, did I not, that Monsieur Gaspard tried the handle and found the door locked? —just as they had come to the decision to break down the door—"

"One moment, please! *Why* had they come to this serious decision? Did they not first call out and ask Monsieur Cuvillier-Millot if aught were wrong? Ah, you forgot to mention that? Pray continue."

"You were right to remind me of what I had overlooked. It is true that when the group arrived outside the door, Monsieur Gaspard called out, several times, 'Uncle, is anything the matter?'—or words to that effect. But there was no answer; and, at a sign from Monsieur Gaspard, the footmen then advanced to throw themselves against the door. At that moment the shot was heard —just one shot; very clear, though not, as the witnesses say, very loud."

"But unmistakably a shot? On which, with commendable courage —for the man with the firearm might have been waiting inside the bedroom for *them*—the footmen hurled themselves against the door, the lock broke, the door opened, and they fell headlong into the room, to see what you have already described to me—nothing. Now, a most important point. After the shot had been fired, did anyone hear the footsteps of the assassin as he ran across the room to the window? Did anyone hear the window opened?"

"No. The reason is easy to comprehend. On hearing the shot, the female domestics, led by the cook, set up such a cry of shock and terror that an army might have tramped across the room and gone unheard."

"So! And though but one person —Monsieur Gaspard—can testify that voices were raised in quarrel, many can testify that a shot was fired immediately before the door was broken down?"

"All, in fact, who were present. Not only did they hear the report of the firearm, they entered a room full of the smoke, to say nothing of the characteristic odor of gunpowder."

"We must recover the ball—if it still be in the dead man's head. Is it?"

"Is it still in the dead man's head? Yes, there is but one wound—that of entry. Evidently the ball did not penetrate with sufficient force to pass through the skull."

"Do you not find that fact remarkable?" Dupin asked.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"How so? It merely means that the charge was a light one; the muscles at the back of the head are very thick and tough—I have known many cases where they have stopped a ball."

"Perhaps. But have you known them to stop a ball fired against the skin? No matter, all these points will be resolved later. What I should like you first to do is to cause a police surgeon to probe for the bullet, and—having found it—to remove it without damaging it in any way. Can this be done?"

G—— looked dubious. "The family's friends will not approve. The dead banker is even now lying in state in his drawing-room. But—yes, of course, Dupin, you shall have the bullet. Why do you wish it?"

"I desire to know the type of firearm from which it came."

Dupin and I were present when the two surgeons attached to the Prefecture of Police carried out the *post-mortem* examination of the deceased banker. The formal permission of the dead man's nearest relative—in this case, Monsieur Gaspard—had to be obtained; but, though the young man began to voice some objections, G—— soon silenced them by representing the necessity of the autopsy in the interests of justice.

The cadaver was decently carried into a small room adjoining the drawing-room, and here the surgeons prepared to extract the ball in whose nature Dupin had evinced so keen an interest.

The corpse had, of course, been washed, and made presentable by those cosmetic arts in which our modern morticians excel.

Having expressed a wish to examine the body—but more particularly the head—before the surgeons cut into it with their scalpels and bistouries, Dupin went carefully over the entire anatomy with a strong magnifying glass. Rising from the most minute inspection of the wound in the neck, Dupin asked G. if the witnesses who had first discovered the body had noticed the characteristic blackening of a gunshot wound.

"Yes, without doubt. It is not present now, I see, but the undertaker's women would have washed the burnt powder off."

"So thoroughly? The skin, too, does not appear to have been scorched at all. *Diable,* this is a most singular wound to have been caused by a pistol-ball! Monsieur le Préfet, a word with you, please."

Dupin led the Prefect to the far corner of the room, out of hearing of the surgeons, and said, "Unless this household is very different from other households, the washing will be done on a Monday. To-day is Thursday. Let an *agent* be instructed to impound all the dirty linen at present awaiting the week's wash. What shall he look for? Well, in the first place, a particularly dirty handkerchief."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

No more would Dupin say on this point; and when G——, after having issued the requisite instructions, came back to the room, Dupin took him by the arm and called his attention to the wound, handing over his powerful magnifying glass so that G—— might see what my friend had already noticed.

"Observe," said Dupin, "the curious reddening, in perfectly circular form, which rims the wound. This is *not* the customary scorching which occurs with gunshot wounds, but something altogether different. Another point: has either of you gentlemen"—addressing himself to the surgeons—"ever known of a case where, the weapon being brought sufficiently close to the body to cause scorching, there was not some serious derangement of the skin, caused by the escape of gases into the wound opened by the ball? No, gentlemen, and neither have I. Monsieur G—— suggested that the curious nature of this wound might be due to the assassin's having used only a small charge of powder—for what reason, I cannot suggest. It may be so. But now, let us proceed."

"To open the cranium, sir?" the elder of the two surgeons asked, a scalpel in his hand.

"Not yet, sir. First, I should like the stomach evacuated. We have with us, I take it, a stomach-pump?"

A stomach-pump having been produced, the contents of the dead man's stomach were soon transferred to a covered dish, and to this disagreeable material, Dupin, to whom, in the interests of justice, nothing proved an obstacle, gave his minute attention. Indeed, it was with an air of noticeable triumph that he turned to us, and said, "I am astonished that we did not smell it on the man's breath! What, Monsier G——! You, with your sharp scent! Yes, gentlemen—laudanum, and in a very copious draught. Of one thing we may be sure, our dead banker was not very coherent at half-past seven on Tuesday morning, no matter what Monsieur Gaspard heard through the closed door.

"Did the dead man's physician prescribe laudanum? No matter, we shall find out. And now, before you cut, gentlemen, may I beg of you *very carefully* to probe the wound, and tell me exactly how far beneath the surface the ball is lying?"

Watched by a puzzled G—— and (I confess it) by a no more enlightened me, the senior surgeon introduced a fine but strong wire probe into the wound, and pushed it gently forward until, encountering an unyielding surface, he assumed that the ball had been reached. Noting the length of wire which had entered the wound before reaching the ball, Dupin quickly translated this length, by means of a pocket rule, into terms of centimetres.

"Just over seven-and-a-half centimetres—three inches"—for, in those days, the old measurements were more commonly employed than the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

new. "Now, gentlemen, cut, if you please—and I beg of you not to damage the ball in any way."

After a few minutes of the surgeons' grisly labors a leaden ball was placed in Dupin's hand. He examined it with his powerful glass, and uttered a small cry of satisfaction before proffering both ball and glass to G.

"What do you see, Monsieur le Préfet?"

"How very—how *excessively*—odd!" said G——, staring at the ball resting on his thick palm. "It is—how *very* curious! I see what appears to be a set of teeth-marks in a small circle. Dupin, how do you explain this? Could the firing of the pistol have marked the lead of the ball in this most unusual way?"

Dupin did not answer. Taking back the ball from G——, he dropped it into a pocket of his waistcoat, and said briskly, "The body can now be restored to a seemly appearance, and taken back for its lying-in-state. Monsieur G——, I should be infinitely obliged by a sight of the dead man's sleeping chamber, and, in particular, of the cupboard in which he kept his medicines."

We walked up stairs, having dismissed the servants who, out of well-trained habit, sought to accompany us. Dupin carefully surveyed the room in which Monsieur Cuvillier-Millot had died.

One had the impression, in watching my friend at work, that those eyes of his observed everything—what was of importance, and what was not—and took away a complete record of visual, auditory, and tactile impressions (not forgetting, of course, the olfactory), to be analyzed and indexed at leisure, over his favorite pipe, in the peace of our little book-closet in the Rue Dunôt.

As we walked across the room to the small dressing-room adjoining, in which it was to be presumed that Monsieur Cuvillier-Millot had kept his medicines, Dupin said idly, "You will already have made some inquiries relative to the character and standing of Monsieur Gaspard? I venture to suggest that you have uncovered some scandalous information?"

"Indeed. I can hardly believe he would have continued in his uncle's favor had the news of his extravagances and debts come to the ears of the worthy banker. What is more, he was—is, I suppose one should say—being strongly pressed for settlement. There is an expensive young person with whom he has contracted one of those alliances generally as costly as they are irregular. However, he may now whistle at his creditors, with all the banker's millions in his pocket. A happy accident—for him, I mean—that the assassin should have put a fortune in his way."

"I see," said Dupin, opening the medicine-chest, which stood on a side-table, "that the late Monsieur Cuvillier-Millot was obviously not a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

valetudinarian. There is no medicine here that one would not find in most if not all households. Indeed, there is much absent that one might expect to find. Flowers of sulphur. I take this blood-purifier myself. So, I imagine, do most people. Chlorate of potash. Excellent as a throat-gargle. But did Monsieur Cuvillier-Millot suffer from sore throats?

"I can find out. But I suggest that, as he sang in the choir of La Madeleine—yes, he did; does that surprise you?—he had a constant use for chlorate of potash. What else? No laudanum. Well, I hardly expected it. But we shall find it somewhere in the house."

We walked to the window through which the assassin had made his miraculous escape. We opened the casements and leaned out. It was difficult indeed to see how the man could have escaped at all, let alone so quickly that no one had even seen him. I expressed my opinion, and G—— concurred.

"When I shall have explained that to you," Dupin said, with a smile, "you will be in possession of *all* the facts in this extraordinary case. Now I have seen what I need to see. With your permission, Monsieur le Préfet, I shall borrow this iron door-stop."

"Door-stop? But why should you wish to borrow that?"

"When you call at our house this afternoon at five o'clock, precisely, you shall find out why. And—no, there is one other thing. May I call your attention to this splendid clock on the mantel-shelf? Yes, by Bréguet, of course. I wonder if, with all this upset, the servant entrusted with the duty has remembered to wind it? Now, where is the key? Ah, yes, here it is—in its proper place behind the clock."

Dupin held it up for the attention of our perfectly mystified eyes. It was an ordinary steel clock-key, of the fashion of some fifty years or more earlier, but of a type which is still favored by the horologists of Paris. A short tube, which fitted into a hole in the clock's face, was attached to a little crank-handle, with a polished wooden knob.

Dupin took out his pocket-glass, and most minutely examined this commonplace article of domestic use. "Indeed, someone is to be felicitated on the care with which even the clock-key has been wiped. Still, I have a use for this, and I shall also borrow it, if I may."

"You may borrow what you like, Dupin," said G. in a surly tone. "Your whimsicalities are quite beyond my poor powers of comprehension. But I'm not so sure the servants haven't been upset by all this to-do—in spite of what you say. For instance, that door-stop that you propose to borrow: I take it that you didn't notice that it was not standing by the door, but had been moved to the fire-place—within the steel-fender?"

"Ah!" said Dupin, with a pleased expression, "so you *did* notice that! Bravo! Did you also notice another

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

trivial proof of the servants' unusual neglect—this?"

"What is it?" said G——, coming closer, to peer at the object which my friend was holding between two fingers. "Ah, yes. What is it? A short length of black pack-thread? Is it important? Where did you find it?"

"It may be important. And I found it caught in the handle of the bell-pull just to the side of the fireplace."

At Dupin's request I did not accompany him back to our house, but made my way idly in the direction of the river. I walked down the Rue Royale, crossed the Rue St. Honoré, and, finding myself in the Place de la Concorde, obeyed a whim and paid my ten sous to enter the Navalorama, a spectacle I had never seen before.

This ingenious naval panorama, at the entrance of the Champs Elysées, exhibits a truly convincing representation of some of the most famous battles of history, from Salamis to Navarino, with the vessels and the water in motion, and the guns firing most realistically. So full of interest did I find this panorama —one of the many in Paris—that the time passed quickly, and I had to hail a *fiacre* in order to keep my appointment with Dupin and G. in the Faubourg St. Germain.

The clock in the belfry of St. Germain-des-Prés was just striking five as I entered the vestibule of our house, where I was greeted by Hyacinthe with the intelligence that G—— had already arrived—a supererogatory piece of news, since I had seen G.'s spanking English tilbury in our courtyard; and that Monsieur le Chevalier awaited me in the drawing-room.

"Bravo!" said Dupin sarcastically, as I entered the drawing-room. "You are learning the English idea of punctuality—which is to be so punctiliously on time as to give the impression of being late! However, since we are now all present, let us go up stairs to our little back library. I am sorry, Monsieur G——, to put you under the necessity of climbing another pair of stairs, but I have something above well worth your seeing. Pray follow me, please."

Obviously in obedience to some instructions given to him while I was absent, Hyacinthe did not accompany us; and, with Dupin leading the way, we came at last to our favorite room on the third floor. The door, as usual, was closed.

Dupin placed his hand on the door-knob, but, no sooner had he done so than a loud report, as of a pistol's discharge, sounded from within the room.

Dupin flung wide the door, and shouted, "The assassin! After him!"

The window was open—the muslin curtains billowing in the breeze from without and the draught of the opened door from within. Dupin literally hurled himself across the room, to lean half out of the casement, pointing his finger down-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ward, and gesticulating wildly. We crowded after him, thrust ourselves to each side of him, to catch a glance of—what?

"He has vanished!" said Dupin, with a comical expression of disgust. "He must have—no, he cannot have hooked his finger nails into the cracks in the brickwork—yes, I have it!—he must have escaped in one of Mr. Green's balloons. Quick, G——, look up, to see if you can catch a sight of the miscreant disappearing into the clouds!"

G—— threw himself into a *fauteuil* with an angry exclamation.

"Peste!" he said. "Is this another of your jokes, Dupin? It *is* a joke, of course?"

"If so," replied my friend, with a severe expression, "it is a joke which has cost Monsieur Cuvillier-Millot his life. It was upon certain evidence of eyes, ears, and noses that a theory has been built up of an assassin, striking when Monsieur Gaspard—the man who stood most to gain by the dead banker's decease—was in full sight of a dozen trustworthy witnesses. *He* did not fire the shot. Oh, no! How could he have done so, when the shot was fired on the other side of a locked door?

"But tell me, Monsieur le Préfet, did *you* not hear a shot? Do *you* not smell the burnt gunpowder? Did you not see an open window, and jump instantly to the conclusion—placed so cunningly by *me* into *your* head—that there *must* have been some one who had fired the shot, and that some one *must* have escaped through the window, since he was not visible within the room?

"However, now it is different, is it not? A moment's reflection showed you the impossibility of some one's having escaped through a window so far above the ground, and with no tree or other means by which a man, however agile, could have got away so rapidly. You asked me if this were a joke? It is not a joke. Had you asked me, was this a trick, I should have answered —yes."

"You imply," said G—— thoughtfully, "that Monsieur Gaspard is the murderer whom we seek?"

"Monsieur Gaspard," said Dupin decisively, "is without doubt the murderer. He had the motive, the means, and the opportunity, as I propose to demonstrate—though you will have to trick him, as he has tricked you, to extract from him the admission of guilt that you need. Did you find, in the dirty linen, a very dirty handkerchief?"

"Yes. I have it here." G—— took a packet from the tails of his coat and handed it to Dupin, who opened it eagerly, examined it, and then put his nose to it.

"Excellent! This is mere lampblack, since it smells of burnt spermaceti, such as is consumed in lamps, and not of burnt gunpowder. Monsieur Gaspard almost deserved to succeed in his diabolical plan, he was so clever. He used, for the planned killing of his uncle,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

only such things as were to be found in the house. No traceable purchases of arsenic for him! Lamp-black from an ordinary lamp, to smear around the wound! No, not a single substance or object which was not readily to hand in the mansion."

"But how in heaven's name did he shoot his uncle!" G. cried.

Dupin smiled.

"He did not shoot his uncle. *Monsieur Cuvillier-Millot was not shot.* Look at this small piece of plaster-of-Paris: it is a cast of the ball extracted from the dead man's skull."

G—— took it, and examined it.

"Why, yes, here are the indentations—the ring of indentations—that I noticed on the ball when it was first extracted by the surgeons. Now this cast shows the indentations as small teeth, sticking up. *Peste!* what does that ring of teeth remind me of?"

"Of *this,* I suggest," said Dupin, producing the clock-key, and indicating the ratchet at the end of the small tube.

"Dupin, what are you suggesting?"

"You will find," said Dupin calmly, "that Monsieur Gaspard, though he did not enter his uncle's room in the morning, did take in his evening cup of spiced wine. On the evening before the discovery of the murder the wine was even more heavily spiced—with laudanum. If the dead man did not use laudanum, you will find it somewhere in the house.

"Then, at some time in the early morning—but not too early—Monsieur Gaspard entered his uncle's bedroom, took a ball, turned the drugged man until he was face downward, and tapped the ball, using a hammer doubtless muffled in cloth, into the unconscious uncle's brain, with the end of the clock-key. This end is about three inches long—and only to that extent was the ball driven into the head; though that was enough to cause death. He wiped the key—there will be blood as well as lamp-black on the handkerchief—and replaced the key behind the clock. He then set up an ingenious device to trick the domestics a few hours later; then, after opening the window, he left the room and locked the door.

"At his customary time of rising he ran downstairs to report the angry voices within his uncle's room—though, of course, poor Monsieur Cuvillier-Millot had then been dead some two hours or so.

"Monsieur Gaspard, having collected all the servants as witnesses, then approached the door. The witnesses will testify that a shot was heard, and the door was then forced open.

"In strict truth, the shot was heard *as* Monsieur Gaspard put his hand on the door-knob; for all he did was to put his finger under the black pack-thread which had been passed *through* the key-hole and *over* the handle of the bell-pull to the side of the fire-place, and which

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

held—by a quick-release hitch such as sailors or horsemen use—this iron door-stop I borrowed, and that you may now return to the house in the Rue Royale.

"The door-stop, released by the quick-release hitch, fell straight down into the steel-fender which surrounds the fire-place. But—and take careful note of this—it fell on to a mixture of two very ordinary substances, to be found in the medicine-chests in most homes: chlorate of potash and flowers of sulphur, a mixture so highly explosive that it takes but a light blow to detonate it."

"*Diable!* Of course!"

"The bang—the smell of sulphur—the open window—who would not have sworn, on twenty Bibles, that he had heard a shot fired, and been just too late to spy the assassin, detected almost—but not quite—*in flagrante delicto?*

"By the way, with his commendable proclivity for using only the tools to hand, Monsieur Gaspard will have cast himself a ball with the bullet-mould to be found in the case of pistols kept in the library, or gun-room if there is one. Examination under a microscope will establish the origin of the ball taken from the dead banker's head."

G—— coughed.

"Dupin . . . excuse me, but since you have helped me thus far, tell me: how shall I bring the fact of his guilt home to this most ingenious ruffian?"

Dupin smiled, and reached for the tobacco-jar.

"Well, my dear G——, you might begin by re-staging the charade with which I startled and annoyed you a few minutes ago. Even Monsieur Gaspard's aplomb might be so shaken to hear *another* pistol-shot in his dead uncle's bedroom that you might well obtain his confession . . ."

It was so. Three months later, despite the advocacy of those Solons of the French Bar whom Monsieur Gaspard retained to defend him, a melancholy procession set out one morning for a certain space within the Barrière de St. Jacques, and here a dastardly assassin paid the ultimate penalty.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 315th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . The author, Eve Christmas, has had a most interesting life; but she prefers to remain a Woman of Mystery. So we will quote only a few paragraphs from her fascinating letter:

"I was born" (her biographical data begins) "in what was then the Russian Empire to a mother with a French background and a father who was an attorney. Left that country with my family during the revolutionary-upheaval period, under machinegun fire . . . Schooled in France and the Orient—where I spent most of my childhood and 'teens . . . Learned to read, in the Cyrillic alphabet, at four years, three months; at five years of age was taught to read German in the old-fashioned Gothic alphabet. English I began to acquire at the age of nine from a British teacher, and ever since have carried on a love affair with the English language . . ."

Miss Christmas refers to her "first story" as "a story of innuendo"...

THE BURNING OF A WITCH

by EVE CHRISTMAS

IT WAS A FEW YEARS AFTER WORLD War II that I crossed the spoor of an honest-to-wickedness witch. This happened, of all places, on a trans-continental train.

Steadying myself against the swaying of the Super-Chief as it hurtled across the continent, Los Angeles to New York, I entered the dining car. The head steward stepped forward, bowed, then beckoned with a menu folder, "This way, please, Ma'am."

The dinner period was nearing its end and most of the tables were vacant. But the steward, after the custom of his kind, piloted me to a table still occupied by a fiftyish well-groomed matron with frosted hair, and pulled out the chair next to her.

The woman was at the demitasse stage of her meal and so engrossed in a project that she never looked up. With manicure scissors she was cutting across the color snapshot of a handsome young couple, separating the figures. The face of the man in the picture had a strong family resemblance to the face of my table companion—he was probably her

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

son. The woman slipped this part of the snapshot into her handbag, but the other part—of a young woman—she crumpled viciously and dropped into an ashtray. Then she held a lit cigarette to the paper and murmured, "I'm burning a witch."

Well, as the saying goes, it takes all kinds to make this world of ours. I edged away. The woman looked up, realized she had spoken aloud, and blushed. Picking up her handbag, she fled.

After ordering my dinner I poked a fork into the miniature *auto-da-fé,* retrieved the girl's picture, and smoothed it out.

Even with a burn branding one cheek the young face which smiled up at me was an uncommonly beautiful one, clear-cut as a cameo, with violet eyes. Its loveliness was enhanced by the golden sheen of a sleek hairdo and of massive antique-looking earrings.

Here was a usual enough situation—a high-spirited gal, I surmised, locked in a conflict with her mother-in-law. The unusual angle was the depth of venom manifested by the older woman.

By now my dinner was approaching on a waiter's tray. On impulse I dropped the creased, charred picture into my purse and concentrated on the grilled salmon.

To return to my roomette I had to pass through five passenger cars. In the third one, a drawing-room Pullman, I was ambushed. My recent table companion, obviously distressed, barred my way and pleaded, "Do come in for a minute—please! I must explain."

I tried to pass her with a reassuring smile. "No need to explain—in-law conflicts are all too common—"

"Oh, if it were only that!" She wrung her hands. "There's no conflict—not on the surface. She's too clever for that. It's all so dreadful and I'm so helpless . . . May I tell you about it, and then you tell me if I'm going out of my mind!"

Clearly the woman was obsessed by a problem which she had to talk out. I'd often been told that my quiet friendly manner invited confidences, but I hardly expected this from a woman who was a complete stranger. But there was no escape, so I followed her into the compartment and sat down beside her, saying, "Have you tried to walk away from the situation?"

"That's what I'm doing now—I'm going to visit a widowed sister. She has invited me for a lengthy stay, probably at my husband's suggestion. My husband, my son, they're both blind . . . Oh, I don't know what to do!"

She dabbed at her eyes with a lace-edged square.

"My whole family is under a spell. They believe, and they've convinced our doctor, that I've become unhinged on the subject of—of my daughter-in-law. Now you and I are strangers, you know nothing about me, and you look understanding and kind. Let me give you the facts,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and then you tell me whether I'm suffering from delusions, from a change-of-life syndrome—"

She twisted the damp handkerchief this way and that.

"Forgive me if I don't give you my name. We're rather well-known in San—in the Los Angeles area. You may call me Margaret." She was obviously making an effort to speak calmly. "After my son Paul was graduated from college he was sent to Germany, to serve with the Occupation forces. His unit was stationed near a large city. He wrote that it was jammed with freed slave laborers, prisoners released by our army from nearby concentration camps, and by Nazis and their collaborators who had turncoated and gone underground. And there he met *her*.

"She came from one of the smaller countries that had been occupied by the Nazis early in the war. I won't tell you which, for no nation should be blamed for someone like *her* . . . Please, I can't think . . . Give me some Central European name to designate her by."

"Teutonic or Slavic?"

"I don't care."

"How about Olga, Frieda, Christa—"

"Oh, dear God, not Christa!"

"Well, Erika, Thea, Karola?"

"Karola will do. Paul fell for her, hard. Her papers were in order, so he was able to secure permission to marry her. And after his tour of duty he brought her home."

I ventured, "Surely not an unusual situation. American boys have brought back thousands of war brides—"

"Witches?"

Here we go again, I thought. And I asked, "Paul is an only child?"

"Yes." She was intuitive. "You're thinking what my family, my doctor are thinking: I'm the mother who can't let go of her son, who won't cut the silver cord. I'll admit that when I first saw that beautiful girl on my son's arm I *was* jealous. But I took myself in hand and made Karola welcome. My husband, my family, my friends—they all were and are charmed by her.

"She told us that her family was wiped out during the war and she was deported to Germany, to work as a nurse's aide. She added that her experiences had been so tragic that she couldn't bear to talk about them. So I've had no opportunity to ask why her hands show no trace of hard work."

"A nurse's hands aren't necessarily callused."

"That's what I tried to tell myself. And I must admit she's making Paul a perfect wife. Their house is spotless, almost uncomfortably so. She's an obsessive hand-washer—it reminds me of Lady Macbeth's preoccupation . . . Karola's also a gourmet cook. She caters to Paul in every way—"

"Then I'd say your son has done very well for himself."

"So my husband keeps telling me.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And he points out that Karola's an amazing manager. Paul's just starting in his profession, and their income is a modest one. Well, the way she stretches her household money is unbelievable! To me, at least. She goes out, always alone, on bargain-hunting expeditions. Paul insists that she's the world's best shopper. He says, laughingly, that Karola would be *too* perfect for him if it weren't for her one weakness—her fondness for what he calls junk jewelry."

"You mean costume jewelry?"

"Yes. The top drawer of her dresser is lined with cottonwool and filled with necklaces, rings, clips, earrings, bracelets, brooches. I saw them one day when I happened to walk into her bedroom while the drawer was open. She saw me stare at the stuff and I could tell she was furious. Didn't say a word, though, just slammed the drawer shut. And it has a lock—a bureau drawer with a lock! Paul says that before they left Germany she asked for a little money to acquire some pieces that the other refugees had pawned or sold to buy food."

"Sounds plausible to me."

"Doesn't it? Karola's explanations always are, and everyone believes them—everyone but me. When I pointed out to Paul that she couldn't possibly serve him filet mignon on a hamburger budget, he said it took a manager as good as Karola to do that. And he accused me of prejudice against his wife. Now I'm a pretty good shopper myself, and I know you can't buy French doeskin gloves for fifty cents, even if they're seconds. When Karola said she did, I thought I had her. But it was no use telling my husband and son without proof. So I hired a detective to get the proof and help ward off a scandal that might blast Paul's career."

"You suspected—kleptomania?"

"That's the polite term for it. To my surprise the detective found that Karola paid cash for her purchases. In one respect, though, my suspicions were well founded—she was spending money far in excess of what her budget permitted. Where did this cash come from?

"The detective checked out another unpleasant possibility. He reported that, as a wife, Karola was above reproach. I was thrown completely off balance. I raised some more money secretly and had Karola followed until she did something out of the ordinary."

"And did she?"

"She did. One day the detective followed her to a pawnshop that buys old gold. After she left he obtained the pieces she had sold: seventeen wedding rings—some handsome wide bands, others thin and worn, all with inscriptions I couldn't make out. I took them to a foreign-language school downtown. Its teachers identified the inscriptions as husband-wife dedications in German, Polish, Russian, Czech, and Hebrew."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

We stared at each other.

I said hurriedly, "Look, so maybe she smuggled in some genuine old pieces among her junk jewelry, stuff bought at bargain prices from German pawnbrokers, and now she's discreetly reselling these genuine pieces. Not an admirable thing to do, perhaps, but nothing to be burned at the stake for."

"That's just what my husband said when I finally confided in him and after he'd blown his top over what I'd done. He asked, didn't I realize that if Paul ever learned about this, my son would never speak to me again. He insisted I stop having Karola spied on. I promised. But then something happened."

Margaret lit a cigarette. "The Ladies' Aid of our church was preparing to give its annual fund-raising dinner. We use the proceeds to sponsor the admission of European refugees recommended by the Council of Churches. Among those we've brought to this country is our church janitor. His wife, Ilsa, who's under a doctor's care—her health broke down in a Nazi concentration camp—volunteered to help out. Karola also pitched in. She brought meatballs from home and came into the social-hall kitchen, where several of us were working, to prepare her special sour-cream gravy.

"Suddenly Ilsa, her face contorted, pointed at Karola and screamed, 'Witch!' While the minister and his wife tried to calm her, she poured out a hysterical torrent of broken English mixed up with her native tongue. We did gather she was calling Karola something like 'Ludwina' and accusing her of being a friend of the Nazis.

"Karola, pale and quiet, stood her ground. The hysterical woman was led away. The minister apologized, saying that poor Ilsa suffered from a persecution complex—she insisted she was still being pursued by Nazis. Her doctor was recommending commitment. Clearly she had taken Karola for someone out of her past, and we were to think no more about it. After this incident all present rallied around Karola, who served her meatballs and modestly acknowledged everybody's compliments."

Margaret paused to dab at her eyes. "While the after-dinner coffee was being served I slipped away to the janitor's quarters. I gathered that the sobbing Ilsa thought Karola was a certain Ludwina who during the Nazi terror had been the mistress of a concentration-camp commander. Ilsa sobbed, 'Only a witch would profit from her own people's blood!' Her husband shushed her, and I left."

Margaret shakily lit a cigarette. "Before I had a chance to see Ilsa again, our minister arranged to exchange custodians with an affiliated church. I drove over to talk to her, but found her as subdued and tongue-tied as her husband. They must've been warned against making false accusations.

"As a last resort I phoned the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

F.B.I. and asked for a confidential consultation. The agent who talked to me promised to run a check on Karola-Ludwina. Later he got in touch with me and reported that both the Army and the Immigration authorities agreed there was nothing even faintly suspicious about Karola, that there was no reason to believe that she was not the person she claimed to be. Her documents were in perfect order."

"This must have relieved your mind."

"You think so? But suppose Ilsa is right. Suppose, when their Reich crumbled, the Nazi flogmaster whose mistress Karola was, gave her another passport, a genuine one that had belonged to a girl victim? All he had to do was to switch pictures. And because he may have loved her—my God, if the word 'love' can be applied to such as they—he gave her some of the camp's treasure hoard. Then she would be free to make a new life for herself by bewitching an American husband.

"When I suggested this to the F.B.I. man, he repeated there was no evidence of crime, that family heirlooms could be brought into the country tax-free, and told me, for my own peace of mind, that I'd better forget the whole thing. It was evident he thought I was wasting his time on a family squabble."

"He may have been right."

Margaret smiled bitterly. "Yes? Then how about these heirlooms that Karola sold recently? She told the pawnbroker her father had been a dentist."

Margaret picked up a small bag and tipped its contents on the seat between us—a heap of gold fillings and gold crowns used to cap molars. These crowns and fillings did not look new. They were twisted out of shape as if, instead of being handled by delicate dental instruments, they had been pried off violently, perhaps by pliers, leaving specks of tooth enamel still imbedded in the gold.

I gagged, then made the only comment I could think of. "Margaret, you'd better believe that your suspicions are unfounded."

Then, while she sobbed, "God, make those things of hers costume jewelry," I got away, fast.

Next morning on my way to breakfast I looked into Margaret's compartment. It was vacant. She must have left the train during a night or early-morning stop.

Alone at my table I took from my purse the mutilated picture of Karola. Was she a slandered young war bride, coping as best she could with a neurotic mother-in-law? Or was she a woman who had made a pact with Evil? The lovely branded face smiled enigmatically at me.

But I knew. How else could she have got those old fillings and gold crowns?

Crumpling the picture, I placed it in an ashtray, struck a match, and completed the burning of the witch.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 316th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . and a strange and interesting story it is . . .

The author, Mel D. Ames, is a Canadian in his mid-forties. At the time he wrote "The Promise of His Coming" he was working "in sales," but for the preceding ten years he had been a copywriter with an advertising agency in Toronto. He hopes to devote full time eventually to writing fiction—his "first love" . . .

THE PROMISE OF HIS COMING

by MEL D. AMES

SHE COULD NOT SEE HIM, BUT SHE knew he was there, somewhere in the darkness. It was as though on waking she sensed his nearness, intuitively, an instinct born of her love; or was it this new desperate need of him that lately had come to haunt her so incessantly?

After all this time of waiting, was it really he, her beloved David? A sad little sound escaped her lips. How difficult it was to keep her thoughts coherent, when she felt so drowsy . . .

With only a sheet covering her damp and naked body she lay still, listening. It was warm in the room, oppressive, and the air hung heavy upon her like a vaporous shroud. Clusters of inquisitive sunbeams filtered between the vertical slats of the blind and huddled there, close against their narrow ingress, appalled at the gloom; then furtively they stole forward to make shapes and shadows of the furniture.

Strange—opening her eyes like this, to the darkness; it made everything seem so different, almost frightening. If she called his name. Just once, softly. No, she would surprise him. It was not like her to be afraid. He could not be aware of her waking, or he would have spoken. Feigning sleep, she searched deeper into the darkness.

There! By the door, one shadow loomed dark against the others. She gave it her full attention and gradually, as her eyes gathered the meagre light and centered it on him, he began slowly to evolve. Then, making no sound, he moved toward her. It was truly David! How long the time had dragged without him. But now, as she looked at his familiar figure, there was a thread of fear in her gladness. She had the impres-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sion as he neared the bed that he had not moved, though the distance between them had narrowed. He had not appeared to walk!

Nonsense.

She closed her eyes, tight; in trying so hard to see him her vision had blurred. When she looked again, he was closer, more distinct, his white shirt standing out pale against the dark of the room. And though, in the half light, his face was gray, there was a smile on his lips, and his eyes, she could see, were bright with the promise of his coming.

He knelt to kiss her, gently, thinking her asleep. His lips, she felt, were cold—cold from her absence. But excitement began to well up in her, damming tight in her throat, too much to suppress. In a rush of joy she threw her arms about him, responding to his kiss, crying out his name.

"David! David!"

She was not sure whether she actually spoke or, in her excitement, merely visualized the words. His voice, when he answered, was high-pitched and loud. She had difficulty in recognizing it; he seemed on the verge of tears.

"My poor darling. Why did I ever leave you alone?"

"It doesn't matter, David, not now—now that you're here. David?"

Something was wrong. There was something she had to tell him. There had been a telegram, she remembered, but the vague recollection seemed only to stir the disquiet within her.

The weight of his body as he leaned over her became suddenly suffocating. She tried to push him away but he did not seem to understand.

"David. I—I can't breathe! The baby—"

That was it! He did not know about the baby. But she had not *wanted* to tell him, not like this. She had planned it so differently.

"The baby!" His eyes widened incredulously.

She felt suddenly light and happy, the smothering pressure gone from her lungs.

"I didn't want to tell you, in case —"

The fear again. And the telegram. There had been a reason, she knew, why she had not wanted to tell him. But she *had* told him—yes, and he had been angry. No, not angry, not David.

Now she took his hand and placed it on the sheet.

"There, David—feel it move? There! Darling, what shall we name it?"

"Doctor!"

"Silly. Who ever heard—"

"She's still alive, I think, and the baby—I felt it moving."

She looked up, startled.

"David—"

But David was not there. Someone, someone other than David, was standing beside the bed, looking

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

down on her. The door, she saw dimly, had been opened, and the window—but there was no relief in the darkness.

There were voices, and she heard them as though from a great distance. They kept moving farther and farther away from her, until only the darkness remained, closing in over her mind . . .

"Doctor, is she—dead?"

"Yes."

"And the baby?"

"I'm sorry. Are you a relative?"

"No, just a friend. There was only her husband."

"Was?"

"Yes, he was killed in action—Southeast Asia somewhere. The telegram came this morning. I suppose that's why she—she did it."

"Mmm. Pity. You were the first to find her, weren't you?"

"Yes, I smelled the gas and—"

"For the record then, what was her husband's name?"

"Michael Taggart."

"And yours?"

"Mrs. Ambrose. We occupy the apartment just across the hall. Mrs. David Ambrose."

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION *(Act of October 23, 1962; Section 4369, Title 39, United States Code)*

1. Date of filing: October 1, 1967. 2. Title of Publication: Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine. 3. Frequency of Issue: Monthly. 4. Location of Known Office of Publication: 505 Park Ave., New York, N.Y. 10022. 5. Location of the Headquarters or General Business Offices of the Publishers: 505 Park Ave., New York, N.Y. 10022. 6. Names and Addresses of Publisher, Editor, and Managing Editor: Publisher: B. G. Davis, 505 Park Ave., New York, N.Y. 10022. Editor: Ellery Queen, 505 Park Ave., New York, N.Y. 10022. Managing Editor, Clayton Rawson, 505 Park Ave., New York, N.Y. 10022.

7. Owner: Davis Publications, Inc., 505 Park Ave., New York, N.Y. 10022; B. G. Davis, 505 Park Ave., New York, N.Y. 10022; Joel Davis, 505 Park Ave., New York, N.Y. 10022

8. Known Bondholders, Mortgagees, and Other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages or Other Securities: None.

10. Extent and Nature of Circulation. Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months. (A) Total No. Copies Printed (Net Press Run): 265,502; (B) Paid Circulation: (1) Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors and Counter Sales: 70,694; (2) Mail Subscriptions: 111,004; (C) Total Paid Circulation: 181,698; (D) Free Distribution (Including Samples) by Mail, Carrier of Other Means: 278; (E) Total Distribution (Sum of C and D): 181,976; (F) Office Use, Left-over, Unaccounted, Spoiled After Printing: 83,526; (G) Total (Sum of E & F—Should Equal Net Press Run Shown in A): 265,502.

Single Issue Nearest to Filing Date. (A) Total No. of Copies Printed (Net Press Run): 295,437; (B) Paid Circulation (1) Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors and Counter Sales: 79,458; (2) Mail Subscriptions: 126,100; (C) Total Paid Circulation: 205,558; (D) Free Distribution (Including Samples) by Mail, Carrier or Other Means: 285; (E) Total Distribution (Sum of C and D): 205,843; (F) Office Use, Left-over, Unaccounted, Spoiled After Printing: 89,594; (G) Total (Sum of E & F—Should equal net press run shown in A): 295,437.

I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete.

Business Manager:
V. C. Stabile

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CALENDAR OF CRIME

The December novelet in the CALENDAR OF CRIME *series . . . Ellery himself characterized "Comus" as a contemporary Arsène Lupin—as a master of make-up and disguise, an uncanny mimic, an audacious and imaginative thief who took special and diabolical delight in committing "the impossible crime"—in Ellery's own sober and considered judgment, "the most dangerous thief operating in the United States." Here is the duel of wits between Comus and the Queens, father and son, in a Christmas crime that involved the most valuable doll in Miss Ypson's fabulous collection . . .*

WITH THE COMPLIMENTS OF COMUS

by ELLERY QUEEN

THERE IS A LAW AMONG STORY-tellers, originally passed by Editors at the cries (they say) of their constituents, which states that stories about Christmas shall have children in them. This Christmas story is no exception; indeed, those with an aversion to children will complain that we have overdone it. And we confess in advance that this is also a story about Dolls, and that Santa Claus comes into it, and even a Thief; though as to this last, whoever he was—and that was one of the questions—he was certainly not Barabbas, even parabolically.

Another section of the statute governing Christmas stories provides that they shall incline toward Sweetness and Light. The first arises, of course, from the orphans and the savor of the annual Miracle; as for Light, it will be provided at the end, as usual, by that luminous prodigy, Ellery Queen.

The reader of gloomier temper will also find a large measure of Darkness, in the person and works of one who, at least in Inspector Queen's harassed view, was surely the winged Prince of that region. His name, by the way, was not Satan, it was Comus; and this is paradox enough, since the original Comus, as everyone knows, was the god of festive joy and mirth, emotions not commonly associated with the Underworld.

As Ellery struggled to embrace his phantom foe, he puzzled over

Copyright 1948, 1952 by Little Brown and Company; reprinted by permission of the author; originally titled, "The Dauphin's Doll."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

this *non sequitur* in vain; in vain, that is, until Nikki Porter, no scorner of the obvious, suggested that he *might* seek the answer where any ordinary mortal would go at once. And there, to the great man's mortification, it was indeed to be found: on page 262b of Volume 6, *Coleb to Damasci,* of the 175th Anniversary edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica.*

A French conjuror named Comus, performing in London in the year 1789, caused his wife to vanish from the top of a table—the very first time, it appeared, that this feat, uxorial or otherwise, had been accomplished without the aid of mirrors. To track his dark adversary's *nom de nuit* to its historic lair gave Ellery his only glint of satisfaction until that blessed moment when light burst all around him and exorcised the darkness, Prince and all.

But this is chaos.

Our story properly begins not with our invisible character but with our dead one.

Miss Ypson had not always been dead; *au contraire.* She had lived for 78 years, for most of them breathing hard. As her father used to remark, "She was a very active little verb." Miss Ypson's father was a professor of Greek at a small Midwestern university. He had conjugated his daughter with the rather bewildered assistance of one of his brawnier students, an Iowa poultry heiress.

Professor Ypson was a man of distinction. Unlike most professors of Greek, he was a Greek professor of Greek, having been born Gerasymos Aghamos Ypsilonomon in Polykhnitos, on the island of Mytilini, "where," he was fond of recalling on certain occasions, "burning Sappho loved and sung" —a quotation he found unfailingly useful in his extracurricular activities; and the Hellenic ideal notwithstanding, Professor Ypson believed wholeheartedly in immoderation in all things.

This hereditary and cultural background explains the professor's interest in fatherhood—to his wife's chagrin, for Mrs. Ypson's own breeding prowess was confined to the barnyards on which her income was based—a fact of which her husband sympathetically reminded her whenever he happened to sire another wayward chick; he held their daughter to be nothing less than a biological miracle.

The professor's mental processes also tended to confuse Mrs. Ypson. She never ceased to wonder why instead of shortening his name to Ypson, her husband had not sensibly changed it to Jones.

"My dear," the professor once replied, "you are an Iowa snob."

"But nobody," Mrs. Ypson cried, "can spell it or pronounce it!"

"This is a cross," murmured Professor Ypson, "which we must bear with Ypsilanti."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Oh," said Mrs. Ypson.

But Mrs. Ypson continued to look bewildered; she died at an early age, and the professor ran off with a Kansas City variety girl of considerable talent, leaving his baptized chick to be reared by an eggish relative of her mother's, named Jukes.

The only time Miss Ypson heard from her father—except when he wrote charming and erudite little notes requesting, as he termed it, *lucrum*—was in the fourth decade of his odyssey, when he sent her a handsome addition to her collection, a terra-cotta play doll of Greek origin over 3000 years old which, unhappily, Miss Ypson felt duty-bound to return to the Brooklyn Museum from which it had unaccountably vanished.

There was poetry behind Miss Ypson's dolls. At her birth her father, ever harmonious, signalized his devotion to fecundity by naming her Cytherea. This proved the Olympian irony. Even though, as it turned out, Miss Ypson interred five husbands of quite adequate vigor, she remained infertile to the end of her days.

Hence it is classically tragic to find her, when all passion was spent, a sweet little old lady with a vague if eager smile who, under the name of her father, pattered about a vast and echoing New York apartment playing enthusiastically with dolls.

In the beginning they were dolls of common clay: a Billiken, a Kewpie, a Kathe Kruse, a Patsy, a Foxy Grandpa, and so forth. But then, as her need increased, Miss Ypson began her fierce sack of the past.

Down into the land of Pharaoh she went for two pieces of thin desiccated board, carved and painted and with hair of strung beads, and legless—so that they might not run away—which any connoisseur will tell you are the most superb specimens of ancient Egyptian paddle doll extant, far superior to those in the British Museum, although this fact will be denied in certain quarters.

Miss Ypson unearthed a foremother of "Letitia Penn," until her discovery held to be the oldest doll in America, having been brought to Philadelphia from England in 1699 by William Penn as a gift for a playmate of his small daughter's. Miss Ypson's find was a wooden-hearted "little lady" in brocade and velvet which had been sent by Sir Walter Raleigh to the first English child born in the New World. Since Virginia Dare had been born in 1587, not even the Smithsonian dared impugn Miss Ypson's triumph.

On the old lady's racks, in her plate-glass cases, might be seen the wealth of a thousand childhoods. Here could be found "fashion babies" from Fourteenth Century France, sacred dolls of the Orange Free State Fingo tribe, Satsuma pa-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED.

per dolls and court dolls from old Japan, beady-eyed Swedish birch-bark dolls, mammoth-tooth dolls of the Eskimos, feather dolls of the Chippewa, tumble dolls of the ancient Chinese, Coptic bone dolls, Roman dolls dedicated to Diana, *pantin* dolls which had been the street toys of Parisian exquisites before Madame Guillotine swept the boulevards, early Christian dolls in their *crèches* representing the Holy Family—to specify the merest handful of Miss Ypson's collection.

She possessed dolls of pasteboard, dolls of animal skin, spool dolls, crab-claw dolls, eggshell dolls, cornhusk dolls, rag dolls, pine-cone dolls with moss hair, stocking dolls, dolls of *bisque,* dolls of palm leaf, dolls of *papier-mâché,* even dolls made of seed pods. There were dolls forty inches tall, and there were dolls so small that Miss Ypson could hide them in her gold thimble.

Cytherea Ypson's collection bestrode the centuries and took tribute of history. There was no greater—not the fabled playthings of Montezuma, or Victoria's, or Eugene Field's; not the collection at the Metropolitan, at the South Kensington, or at the royal palace in old Bucharest, or anywhere outside the enchantment of little girls' dreams.

It was made of Iowan eggs and the Attic shore, corn-fed and myrtle-clothed; and it brings us at last to Attorney John Somerset Bondling and his visit to the Queen residence one December 23 not so very long ago.

December 23 is ordinarily not a good time to seek the Queens. Inspector Richard Queen likes his Christmas old-fashioned; his turkey stuffing, for instance, calls for 22 hours of over-all preparation and some of its ingredients are not readily found at the corner grocer's. And Ellery is a frustrated gift wrapper. For a month before Christmas he turns his sleuthing genius to tracking down unusual wrapping papers, fine ribbons, and artistic stickers; and he spends the last two days creating beauty.

So it was that when Attorney John S. Bondling called, Inspector Queen was in his kitchen, swathed in a barbecue apron, up to his elbows in *fines herbes,* while Ellery, behind the locked door of his study, composed a secret symphony in glittering fuchsia metallic paper, forest-green moiré ribbon, and pine cones.

"It's almost useless," shrugged Nikki, studying Attorney Bondling's card, which was as crackly-looking as Attorney Bondling. "You say you know the Inspector, Mr. Bondling?"

"Just tell him Bondling the estate lawyer," said Bondling. "Park Row. He'll know."

"Don't blame me," said Nikki, "if you wind up in his stuffing. Goodness knows he's used every-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thing else." And she went for Inspector Queen.

While she was gone, the study door opened noiselessly for one inch. A suspicious eye reconnoitered from the crack.

"Don't be alarmed," said the owner of the eye, slipping through the crack and locking the door hastily behind him. "Can't trust them, you know. Children, just children."

"Children!" Attorney Bondling snarled. "You're Ellery Queen, aren't you?"

"Yes?"

"Interested in youth, are you? Christmas? Orphans, dolls, that sort of thing?" Mr. Bondling went on in a remarkably nasty way.

"I suppose so."

"The more fool you. Ah, here's your father. Inspector Queen—!"

"Oh, *that* Bondling," said the old gentleman absently, shaking his visitor's hand. "My office called to say you were coming up. Here, use my handkerchief; that's a bit of turkey liver. Know my son? His secretary, Miss Porter? What's on your mind, Mr. Bondling?"

"Inspector, I'm handling the Cytherea Ypson estate, and—"

"Nice meeting you, Mr. Bondling," said Ellery. "Nikki, that door is locked, so don't pretend you forgot the way to the bathroom."

"Cytherea Ypson," frowned the Inspector. "Oh, yes. She died only recently."

"Leaving me with the headache," said Mr. Bondling bitterly, "of disposing of her Dollection."

"Her what?" asked Ellery, looking up from the key.

"Dolls—collection. Dollection. She coined the word."

Ellery put the key back in his pocket and strolled over to his armchair.

"Do I take this down?" sighed Nikki.

"Dollection," said Ellery.

"Spent about thirty years at it. Dolls!"

"Yes, Nikki, take it down."

"Well, well, Mr. Bondling," said Inspector Queen. "What's the problem? Christmas comes but once a year, you know."

"Will provides the Dollection be sold at auction," grated the attorney, "and the proceeds used to set up a fund for orphan children. I'm holding the public sale right after New Year's."

"Dolls and orphans, eh?" said the Inspector, thinking of Javanese black pepper and Country Gentleman Seasoning Salt.

"That's *nice*," beamed Nikki.

"Oh, is it?" said Mr. Bondling softly. "Apparently, young woman, you've never tried to satisfy a Surrogate. I've administered estates for nine years without a whisper against me, but let an estate involve the interests of just one little ba—little fatherless child, and you'd think from the Surrogate's attitude I was Bill Sykes himself!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"My stuffing—" began the Inspector.

"I've had those dolls catalogued. The result is frightening! Did you know there's no set market for the damnable things? And aside from a few personal possessions, the Dollection constitutes the old lady's entire estate. Sank every nickel she had in it."

"But it should be worth a fortune," protested Ellery.

"To whom, Mr. Queen? Museums always want such things as free and unencumbered gifts. I tell you, except for one item, those hypothetical orphans won't realize enough from that sale to keep them in—in bubble gum for two days!"

"Which item would that be, Mr. Bondling?"

"Number Eight-seventy-four," snapped the lawyer. "This one."

"Number Eight-seventy-four," read Inspector Queen from the fat catalogue Bondling had fished out of his greatcoat pocket. "The Dauphin's Doll. Unique. Ivory figure of a boy Prince eight inches tall, clad in court dress, genuine ermine, brocade, velvet. Court sword in gold strapped to waist. Gold circlet crown surmounted by single blue brilliant diamond of finest water, weight approximately 49 carats—"

"How many carats?" exclaimed Nikki.

"Larger than the *Hope* and the *Star of South Africa*," said Ellery, with a certain excitement.

"—appraised," continued his father, "at one hundred and ten thousand dollars."

"Expensive dollie."

"Indecent!" said Nikki.

"This indecent—I mean exquisite royal doll," the Inspector read on, "was a birthday gift from King Louis XVI of France to Louis Charles, his second son, who became dauphin at the death of his elder brother in 1789. The dauphin was proclaimed Louis XVII by the royalists during the French Revolution while in custody of the *sans-culottes*. His fate is shrouded in mystery. Romantic, historic item."

"*Le prince perdu*. I'll say," muttered Ellery. "Mr. Bondling, is this on the level?"

"I'm an attorney, not an antiquarian," snapped their visitor. "There are documents attached, one of them a sworn statement—holograph—by Lady Charlotte Atkyns, the English actress-friend of the Capet family—she was in France during the Revolution—or purporting to be in Lady Charlotte's hand. It doesn't matter, Mr. Queen. Even if the history is bad, the diamond's good!"

"I take it this hundred-and-ten-thousand dollar dollie constitutes the bone, as it were, or that therein lies the rub?"

"You said it!" cried Mr. Bondling, cracking his knuckles in a sort of agony. "For my money the Dauphin's Doll is the only negotiable asset of that collection. And

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

what did the old lady do? She provides by will that on the day preceding Christmas the Cytherea Ypson Dollection is to be publicly displayed—on the main floor of Nash's Department Store! *The day before Christmas, gentlemen!* Think of it!"

"But why?" asked Nikki, puzzled.

"Why? Who knows why? For the entertainment of New York's army of little beggars, I suppose! Have you any notion how many peasants pass through Nash's on the day before Christmas? My cook tells me—she's a very religious woman—it's like Armageddon."

"The day before Christmas," frowned Ellery. "That's tomorrow."

"It does sound chancy," said Nikki anxiously. Then she brightened. "Oh, well, maybe Nash's won't cooperate, Mr. Bondling."

"Oh, won't they!" howled Mr. Bondling. "Why, old lady Ypson had this stunt cooked up with that gang of peasant-purveyors for years! They've been snapping at my heels ever since the day she was put away!"

"It'll draw every crook in New York," said the Inspector, his gaze on the kitchen door.

"Orphans," said Nikki. "The orphans' interests *must* be protected." She looked at her employer accusingly.

"Special measures, Dad," said Ellery.

"Sure, sure," said the Inspector, rising. "Don't you worry about this, Mr. Bondling. Now if you'll be kind enough to excu—"

"Inspector Queen," said Mr. Bondling, leaning forward tensely, "that is not all."

"Ah." Ellery briskly lit a cigarette. "There's a specific villain in this piece, Mr. Bondling, and you know who he is."

"I do," said the lawyer hollowly, "and then again I don't. I mean, it's Comus."

"Comus!" the Inspector bellowed.

"Comus?" said Ellery slowly.

"Comus?" said Nikki. "Who's that?"

"Comus," nodded Mr. Bondling. "First thing this morning. Marched right into my office, bold as day—must have followed me. I hadn't got my coat off, my secretary wasn't even in—marched in and tossed this card on my desk."

Ellery seized it. "The usual, Dad."

"His trademark," growled the Inspector.

"But the card just says 'Comus,'" complained Nikki. "Who—?"

"Go on, Mr. Bondling!" thundered the Inspector.

"And he calmly announced," said Bondling, blotting his cheeks with an exhausted handkerchief, "that he's going to steal the Dauphin's Doll tomorrow, in Nash's."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Oh, a maniac," said Nikki.

"Mr. Bondling," said the old gentleman in a terrible voice, "just what did this fellow look like?"

"Foreigner—black beard—spoke with a thick accent of some sort. To tell you the truth, I was so thunderstruck I didn't notice details. Didn't even chase him till it was too late."

The Queens shrugged at each other.

"The old story," said the Inspector. "The brass of the colonel's monkey and when he does show himself nobody remembers anything but beards and foreign accents. Well, Mr. Bondling, with Comus in the game it's serious business. Where's the collection right now?"

"In the vaults of the Life Bank and Trust, Forty-third Street branch."

"What time are you to move it over to Nash's?"

"They wanted it this evening. I said nothing doing. I've made special arrangements with the bank, and the collection's to be moved at seven thirty tomorrow morning."

"Won't be much time to set up," said Ellery thoughtfully, "before the store opens its doors." He glanced at his father.

"You leave Operation Dollie to us, Mr. Bondling," said the Inspector grimly. "Better give me a buzz this afternoon."

"I can't tell you, Inspector, how relieved I am—"

"Are you?" said the old gentleman sourly. "What makes you think he won't get it?"

When Attorney Bondling had left, the Queens put their heads together, Ellery doing most of the talking. Finally, the Inspector went into the bedroom for a session with his direct line to Headquarters.

"Anybody would think," sniffed Nikki, "you two were planning the defense of the Bastille. Who is this Comus, anyway?"

"We don't know, Nikki," said Ellery slowly. "Might be anybody. Began his criminal career about five years ago. He's in the grand tradition of Lupin—a saucy, highly intelligent rascal who's made stealing an art. He seems to take a special delight in stealing valuable things under virtually impossible conditions. Master of make-up—he's appeared in a dozen different disguises. And he's an uncanny mimic. Never been caught, photographed, or fingerprinted. Imaginative, daring—I'd say he's the most dangerous thief operating in the United States."

"If he's never been caught," said Nikki skeptically, "how do you know he commits these crimes?"

"You mean and not someone else?" Ellery smiled. "The techniques mark the thefts as his work. And then, like Arsène, he leaves a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

card—with the name 'Comus' on it —on the scene of each visit."

"Does he usually announce in advance that he's going to swipe the crown jewels?"

"No." Ellery frowned. "To my knowledge, this is the first such instance. Since he's never done anything without a reason, that visit to Bondling's office this morning must be part of his greater plan. I wonder if—"

The telephone in the living room rang clear and loud.

Nikki looked at Ellery. Ellery looked at the telephone.

"Do you suppose—?" began Nikki. But then she said, "Oh, it's too absurd."

"Where Comus is involved," said Ellery, "nothing is too absurd!" and he leaped for the phone. "Hello!"

"A call from an old friend," announced a deep and hollowish male voice. "Comus."

"Well," said Ellery. "Hello again."

"Did Mr. Bondling," asked the voice jovially, "persuade you to 'prevent' me from stealing the Dauphin's Doll in Nash's tomorrow?"

"So you know Bondling's been here."

"No miracle involved, Queen. I followed him. Are you taking the case?"

"See here, Comus," said Ellery. "Under ordinary circumstances I'd welcome the sporting chance to put you where you belong. But these circumstances are not ordinary. That doll represents the major asset of a future fund for orphaned children. I'd rather we didn't play games with it. Comus, what do you say we call this one off?"

"Shall we say," asked the voice gently, "Nash's Department Store —tomorrow?"

Thus the early morning of December 24 finds Messrs. Queen and Bondling, and Nikki Porter, huddled on the iron sidewalk of Forty-third Street before the holly-decked windows of the Life Bank & Trust Company, just outside a double line of armed guards. The guards form a channel between the bank entrance and an armored truck, down which Cytherea Ypson's Dollection flows swiftly. And all about gapes New York, stamping callously on the aged, icy face of the street against the uncharitable Christmas wind.

Now is the winter of our discontent, and Mr. Queen curses.

"I don't know what you're beefing about," moans Miss Porter. "You and Mr. Bondling are bundled up like Yukon prospectors. Look at *me*."

"It's that rat-hearted public relations tripe from Nash's," says Mr. Queen murderously. "They all swore themselves to secrecy, Brother Rat included. Honor! Spirit of Christmas!"

"It was all over the radio last

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

night," whimpers Mr. Bondling. "And in this morning's papers."

"I'll cut his creep's heart out. Here! Velie, keep those people away!"

Sergeant Velie says good-naturedly from the doorway of the bank, "You jerks stand back." Little does the Sergeant know the fate in store for him.

"Armored trucks," says Miss Porter bluishly. "Shotguns."

"Nikki, Comus made a point of informing us in advance that he meant to steal the Dauphin's Doll in Nash's Department Store. It would be just like him to have said that in order to make it easier to steal the doll en route."

"Why don't they hurry?" shivers Mr. Bondling. "Ah!"

Inspector Queen appears suddenly in the doorway. His hands clasp treasure.

"Oh!" cries Nikki.

New York whistles.

It is magnificence, an affront to democracy. But street mobs, like children, are royalists at heart.

New York whistles, and Sergeant Thomas Velie steps menacingly before Inspector Queen, Police Positive drawn, and Inspector Queen dashes across the sidewalk between the bristling lines of guards with the Dauphin's Doll in his embrace.

Queen the Younger vanishes, to materialize an instant later at the door of the armored truck.

"It's just immorally, hideously beautiful, Mr. Bondling," breathes Miss Porter, sparkly-eyed.

Mr. Bondling cranes, thinly.

ENTER *Santa Claus, with bell.*

Santa, Oyez, oyez. Peace, good will. Is that the dollie the radio's been yappin' about, folks?

Mr. B. Scram.

Miss P. Why, Mr. Bondling!

Mr. B. Well, he's got no business here. Stand back, er, Santa. Back!

Santa. What eateth you, my lean and angry friend? Have you no compassion at this season of the year?

Mr. B. Oh . . . Here! (*Clink.*) Now will you *kindly*—

Santa. Mighty pretty dollie. Where they takin' it, girlie?

Miss P. Over to Nash's, Santa.

Mr. B. You asked for it. Officer!

Santa (hurriedly). Little present for you, girlie. Compliments of Santy. Merry, merry.

Miss P. For me? (EXIT *Santa, rapidly, with bell.*) Really, Mr. Bondling, was it necessary to—

Mr. B. Opium for the masses! What did that faker hand you, Miss Porter? What's in that unmentionable envelope?

Miss P. I'm sure I don't know, but isn't it the most touching idea? Why, it's addressed to *Ellery.* Oh! Elleryyyyyy!

Mr. B. (EXIT *excitedly*). Where is he? Officer! Where did that baby-deceiver disappear to? A Santa Claus!

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mr. Q (*entering on the run*). Yes? Nikki, what is it? What's happened?

Miss P. A man dressed as Santa Claus just handed me this envelope. It's addressed to you.

Mr. Q. Note? (*He snatches it, withdraws a miserable slice of paper from it on which is block-lettered in pencil a message which he reads aloud with considerable expression.*) "Dear Ellery, Don't you trust me? I said I'd steal the Dauphin *in* Nash's emporium today and that's exactly where I'm going to do it. Yours—"Signed—

Miss P (*craning*). "Comus." That Santa?

Mr. Q. (*Sets his manly lips. An icy wind blows.*)

Even Ellery had to acknowledge that their defenses against Comus were ingenious.

From the Display Department of Nash's they had requisitioned four miter-joined counters of uniform length. These they had fitted together, and in the center of the hollow square thus formed they had erected a platform six feet high. On the counters, in plastic tiers, stretched the long lines of Miss Ypson's babies.

Atop the platform, dominant, stood a great chair of hand-carved oak, filched from the Swedish Modern section of the Fine Furniture Department; and on this Valhalla-like throne sat Sergeant Thomas Velie of Police Headquarters, morosely grateful for the anonymity endowed by the scarlet suit and the jolly mask and whiskers of his appointed role.

Nor was this all. At a distance of six feet outside the counters shimmered a surrounding rampart of plate glass, borrowed in its various elements from *The Glass Home of the Future* display on the sixth floor rear, and assembled to shape an eight-foot wall quoined with chrome, its glistening surfaces flawless except at one point, where a thick glass door had been installed. But the edges fitted intimately and there was a formidable lock in the door, the key to which lay buried in Ellery's right trouser pocket.

It was 8:54 A.M. The Queens, Nikki Porter, and Attorney Bondling stood among store officials and an army of plainclothesmen on Nash's main floor surveying the product of their labors.

"I think that about does it," muttered Inspector Queen at last. "Men! Positions around the glass partition."

Twenty-four assorted policemen in mufti jostled one another. They took marked places about the wall, facing it and grinning up at Sergeant Velie. Sergeant Velie, from his throne, glared back.

"Hagstrom and Piggott—the door."

Two detectives detached themselves from a group of reserves. As

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

they marched to the glass door, Mr. Bondling plucked at the Inspector's overcoat sleeve. "Can all these men be trusted, Inspector Queen?" he whispered. "I mean, this fellow Comus—"

"Mr. Bondling," replied the old gentleman coldly, "you do your job and let me do mine."

"But—"

"Picked men, Mr. Bondling! I picked 'em myself."

"Yes, yes, Inspector. I merely thought—"

"Lieutenant Farber."

A little man with watery eyes stepped forward.

"Mr. Bondling, this is Lieutenant Geronimo Farber, Headquarters jewelry expert. Ellery?"

Ellery took the Dauphin's Doll from his greatcoat pocket, but he said, "If you don't mind, Dad, I'll keep holding on to it."

Somebody said, "Wow," and then there was silence.

"Lieutenant, this doll in my son's hand is the famous Dauphin's Doll with the diamond crown that—"

"Don't touch it, Lieutenant, please," said Ellery. "I'd rather nobody touched it."

"The doll," continued the Inspector, "has just been brought here from a bank vault which it ought never to have left, and Mr. Bondling, who's handling the Ypson estate, claims it's the genuine article. Lieutenant, examine the diamond and give us your opinion."

Lieutenant Farber produced a *loupe*. Ellery held the dauphin securely, and Farber did not touch it.

Finally the expert said, "I can't pass an opinion about the doll itself, of course, but the diamond's a beauty. Easily worth a hundred thousand dollars at the present state of the market—maybe more. Looks like a very strong setting, by the way."

"Thanks, Lieutenant. Okay, son," said the Inspector. "Go into your waltz."

Clutching the dauphin, Ellery strode over to the glass gate and unlocked it.

"This fellow Farber," whispered Attorney Bondling in the Inspector's hairy ear. "Inspector, are you absolutely sure he's—?"

"He's really Lieutenant Farber?" The Inspector controlled himself. "Mr. Bondling, I've known Gerry Farber for eighteen years. Calm yourself."

Ellery was crawling perilously over the nearest counter. Then, bearing the dauphin aloft, he hurried across the floor of the enclosure to the platform.

Sergeant Velie whined, "Maestro, how in hell am I going to sit here all day without washin' my hands?"

But Ellery merely stooped and lifted from the floor a heavy little structure faced with black velvet consisting of a floor and a backdrop, with a two-armed chromium support. This object he placed on

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the platform directly between Sergeant Velie's massive legs.

Carefully, he stood the Dauphin's Doll in the velvet niche. Then he climbed back across the counter, went through the glass door, locked it with the key, and turned to examine his handiwork.

Proudly the prince's plaything stood, the jewel in his little golden crown darting "on pale electric streams" under the concentrated tide of a dozen of the most powerful floodlights in the possession of the great store.

"Velie," said Inspector Queen, "you're not to touch that doll. Don't lay a finger on it."

The Sergeant said, "Gaaaaa."

"You men on duty. Don't worry about the crowds. Your job is to keep watching that doll. You're not to take your eyes off it all day. Mr. Bondling, are you satisfied?" Mr. Bondling seemed about to say something, but then he hastily nodded.

The great man smiled. "The only way he can get that bawbie," he said, "is by well directed mortar fire or spells and incantations. Raise the portcullis!"

Then began the interminable day—the last shopping day before Christmas. This is traditionally the day of the inert, the procrastinating, the undecided, and the forgetful, sucked at last into the mercantile machine by the perpetual pump of Time. If there is peace upon earth, it descends only afterward; and at no time, on the part of anyone embroiled, is there good will toward men. As Miss Porter expresses it, a cat fight in a bird cage would be more Christian.

But on this December 24, in Nash's, the normal bedlam was augmented by the vast shrilling of thousands of children. It may be, as the Psalmist insists, that happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them; but no bowmen surrounded Miss Ypson's darlings this day—only detectives carrying revolvers, not a few of whom forbore to use same only by the most heroic self-discipline.

In the black floods of humanity overflowing the main floor, little folks darted about like electrically charged minnows, pursued by exasperated maternal shrieks and the imprecations of those whose shins and rumps and toes were at the mercy of hot, happy little limbs; indeed, nothing was sacred, and Attorney Bondling was seen to quail and wrap his greatcoat defensively about him against the savage innocence of childhood.

But the guardians of the law, having been ordered to simulate store employees, possessed no such armor; and many a man earned his citation that day for unique cause. They stood in the millrace of the tide; it churned about them, shouting, "Dollies! *Dollies!*" until the very word lost its familiar meaning and became the insensate

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

scream of a thousand Loreleis beckoning strong men to destruction below the eye-level of their diamond Light.

But they stood fast.

And Comus was thwarted. Oh, he tried. At 11:18 A.M. a tottering old man holding fast to the hand of a small boy tried to wheedle Detective Hagstrom into unlocking the glass door "so my grandson here—he's terrible near-sighted—can get a closer look at the pretty dollies." Detective Hagstrom roared, "Rube!" and the old gentleman dropped the little boy's hand violently and with remarkable agility lost himself in the crowd.

A spot investigation revealed that, coming upon the boy, who had been crying for his mommy, the old gentleman had promised to find her. The little boy, whose name—he said—was Lance Morganstern, was removed to the Lost and Found Department; and everyone was satisfied that the great thief had finally launched his attack. Everyone, that is, but Ellery Queen. He seemed puzzled. When Nikki asked him why, he merely said, "Stupidity, Nikki. It's not in character."

At 1:46 P.M., Sergeant Velie sent up a distress signal. He had, it seemed, to wash his hands. Inspector Queen signaled back: "Okay. Fifteen minutes." Sergeant Santa C. Velie scrambled off his perch, clawed his way over the counter, and pounded urgently on the inner side of the glass door.

Ellery let him out, relocking the door immediately, and the Sergeant's red-clad figure disappeared on the double in the general direction of the main-floor Gents' Room, leaving the dauphin in solitary possession of the dais.

During the Sergeant's recess, Inspector Queen circulated among his men repeating the order of the day.

The episode of Velie's absence caused a temporary crisis. For at the end of the specified fifteen minutes he had not returned. Nor was there a sign of him at the end of a half hour.

An aide dispatched to the Men's Room reported back that the Sergeant was not there. Fears of foul play were voiced at an emergency staff conference held then and there, and countermeasures were being planned even as, at 2:35 P.M., the familiar Santa-clad bulk of the Sergeant was observed battling through the lines, pawing at his mask.

"Velie," snarled Inspector Queen, "where have you been?"

"Eating my lunch," growled the Sergeant's voice, defensively. "I been taking my punishment like a good soldier all this damn day, Inspector, but I draw the line at starvin' to death even in line of duty."

"Velie—!" choked the Inspector; but then he waved his hand feebly

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and said, "Ellery, let him back in there."

And that was very nearly all. The only other incident of note occurred at 4:22 P.M. A well-upholstered woman with a red face yelled, "Stop! Thief! He grabbed my pocketbook! Police!" about fifty feet from the Ypson exhibit.

Ellery instantly shouted, *"It's a trick! Men, don't take your eyes off that doll!"*

"It's Comus disguised as a woman," exclaimed Attorney Bondling, as Inspector Queen and Detective Hesse wrestled the female figure through the mob. She was now a wonderful shade of magenta.

"What are you *doing*?" she screamed. "Don't arrest *me*!—catch that crook who stole my pocketbook!"

"No dice, Comus," said the Inspector. "Wipe off that make-up."

"McComas?" said the woman loudly. "My name is Rafferty, and all these folks saw it. He was a fat man with a mustache."

"Inspector," said Nikki Porter, making a surreptitious scientific test. "This is a female. Believe me."

And so, indeed, it proved. All agreed that the mustachioed fat man had been Comus, creating a diversion in the desperate hope that the resulting confusion would give him an opportunity to steal the little dauphin.

"Stupid, stupid," muttered Ellery, gnawing his fingernails.

"Sure," grinned the Inspector. "We've got him nibbling his tail, Ellery. This was his do-or-die pitch. He's through."

"Frankly," sniffed Nikki, "I'm a little disappointed."

"Worried," said Ellery, "would be the word for me."

Inspector Queen was too case-hardened a sinner's nemesis to lower his guard at his most vulnerable moment. When the 5:30 bells bonged and the crowds began struggling toward the exits, he barked, "Men, stay at your posts. Keep watching that doll!"

So all hands were on the *qui vive* even as the store emptied. The reserves kept hustling people out. Ellery, standing on an Information Booth, spotted bottlenecks and waved his arms.

At 5:50 P.M. the main floor was declared out of the battle zone. All stragglers had been herded out. The only persons visible were the refugees trapped by the closing bell on the upper floors, and these were pouring out of elevators and funneled by a solid line of detectives and accredited store personnel to the doors.

By 6:05 they were a trickle; by 6:10 even the trickle had dried up. And the personnel itself began to disperse.

"No, men!" called Ellery sharply from his observation post. "Stay where you are till all the store employees are out!" The counter clerks had long since disappeared.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Sergeant Velie's plaintive voice called from the other side of the glass door. "I got to get home and decorate my tree. Maestro, make with the key."

Ellery jumped down and hurried over to release him. Detective Piggott jeered, "Going to play Santa to your kids tomorrow morning, Velie?" at which the Sergeant managed even through his mask to project a four-letter word distinctly, forgetful of Miss Porter's presence, and stamped off.

"Where you going, Velie?" asked the Inspector, smiling.

"I got to get out of these x-and-dash Santy clothes somewheres, don't I?" came back the Sergeant's mask-muffled tones, and he vanished in a thunderclap of his fellow officers' laughter.

"Still worried, Mr. Queen?" chuckled the Inspector.

"I don't understand it." Ellery shook his head. "Well, Mr. Bondling, there's your dauphin, untouched by human hands."

"Yes. Well!" Attorney Bondling wiped his forehead happily. "I don't profess to understand it, either, Mr. Queen. Unless it's simply another case of an inflated reputation." He clutched the Inspector suddenly. "Those men!" he whispered. *"Who are they?"*

"Relax, Mr. Bondling," said the Inspector good-naturedly. "It's just the men to move the dolls back to the bank. Wait a minute, you men! Perhaps, Mr. Bondling, we'd better see the dauphin back to the vaults ourselves."

"Keep those fellows back," said Ellery to the Headquarters men, quietly, and he followed the Inspector and Mr. Bondling into the enclosure. They pulled two of the counters apart at one corner and strolled over to the platform. The dauphin was winking at them in a friendly way. They stood looking at him.

"Cute little devil," said the Inspector.

"Seems silly now," beamed Attorney Bondling. "Being so worried all day."

"Comus must have had *some* plan," mumbled Ellery.

"Sure," said the Inspector. "That old man disguise. And that purse-snatching act."

"No, no, Dad. He's always pulled something clever."

"Well, there's the diamond," said the lawyer comfortably. "He didn't."

"Disguise," muttered Ellery. "It's always been a disguise. Santa Claus costume—he used that once—this morning in front of the bank . . . Did we see a Santa Claus around here today?"

"Just Velie," said the Inspector, grinning. "And I hardly think—"

"Wait a moment, please," said Attorney Bondling in a very odd voice.

He was staring at the Dauphin's Doll.

"Wait for what, Mr. Bondling?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"What's the matter?" said Ellery, also in a very odd voice.

"But . . . not possible . . ." stammered Bondling. He snatched the doll from its black velvet repository. *"No!"* he howled. *"This isn't the dauphin! It's a fake—a copy!"*

Something happened in Mr. Queen's head—a little *click!* Like the turn of a switch. And there was light.

"Some of you men!" he roared. *"After Santa Claus!"*

"Who, Mr. Queen?"

"What's he talkin' about?"

"After who, Ellery?" gasped Inspector Queen.

"Don't stand here! *Get him!*" Ellery shouted, dancing up and down. "The man I just let out of here! The Santa who made for the Men's Room!"

Detectives started running, wildly.

"But Ellery," said a small voice, and Nikki found that it was her own, "that was Sergeant Velie."

"It was *not* Velie, Nikki! When Velie ducked out just before two o'clock, *Comus waylaid him!* It was Comus who came back in Velie's Santa Claus rig, wearing Velie's whiskers and mask! *Comus has been on this platform all afternoon!*" He tore the dauphin from Attorney Bondling's grasp. "Copy . . . He did it, he did it."

"But Mr. Queen," whispered Attorney Bondling, "his voice. He spoke to us in Sergeant Velie's voice."

"I said yesterday Comus is a great mimic. Lieutenant Farber! Is Farber still here?"

The jewelry expert, who had been gaping from a distance, shook his head as if to clear it and shuffled into the enclosure.

"Lieutenant," said Ellery in a strangled voice. "Examine this diamond. I mean, *is* it a diamond?"

Inspector Queen removed his hands from his face and said froggily, "Well, Gerry?"

Lieutenant Farber squinted once through his *loupe*. "It's strass—"

"It's what?" said the Inspector piteously.

"Strass, Dick—lead glass—paste. Beautiful job of imitation—as nice as I've ever seen."

"Lead me to that Santa Claus," whispered Inspector Queen.

But Santa Claus was being led to him. Struggling in the grip of a dozen detectives, his red coat ripped off, his red pants around his ankles, but his whiskery mask still on his face, came a large shouting man.

"But I tell you," he was roaring, "I'm Sergeant Tom Velie! Just take the mask off—that's all!"

"It's a pleasure," growled Detective Hagstrom, trying to break their prisoner's arm, "we're reservin' for the Inspector."

"Hold him, boys," whispered the Inspector. He struck like a cobra. His hand came away with Santa's face.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And there, indeed, was Sergeant Velie.

"Why, it *is* Velie," said the Inspector wonderingly.

"I only told you that a thousand times," said the Sergeant, folding his great hairy arms across his great hairy chest. "Now who's the so-and-so who tried to bust my arm?" Then he said, "My pants!" And as Miss Porter turned delicately away, Detective Hagstrom humbly stooped and raised Sergeant Velie's pants.

"Never mind that," said a cold, remote voice.

"Yeah?" said Sergeant Velie, hostilely.

"Velie, weren't you attacked when you went to the Men's Room just before two?"

"Do I look like the attackable type?"

"You did go to lunch?—in person?"

"And a lousy lunch it was."

"It was *you* up here among the dolls all afternoon?"

"Nobody else, Maestro. Now, my friends, I want action. Fast patter. What's this all about? Before," said Sergeant Velie softly, "I lose my temper."

It was Inspector Richard Queen who spoke. "Ellery. How in the name of the second sin did he do it?"

"Pa," replied his famous son, "you got me."

Deck the hall with boughs of holly, but not if your name is Queen on the evening of a certain December 24. If your name is Queen on that lamentable evening you are seated in the living room of a New York apartment uttering no falalas but staring miserably into a somber fire. And you have company. The guest list is short, but select. It numbers two, a Miss Porter and a Sergeant Velie, and they are no comfort.

No, no ancient Yuletide carol is being trolled; only the silence sings.

Wail in your crypt, Cytherea Ypson; all was for naught; your little dauphin's treasure lies not in the empty coffers of the orphans but in the clutch of one who took his evil inspiration from a long-crumbled specialist in vanishments.

Speech was spent. Should a wise man utter vain knowledge, and fill his belly with the east wind? He who talks too much commits a sin, says the Talmud. He also wastes his breath; and they had now reached the point of conservation, having exhausted the available supply.

Item: Lieutenant Geronimo Farber of Police Headquarters had examined the diamond in the genuine dauphin's crown a matter of seconds before it was conveyed to its sanctuary in the enclosure. Lieutenant Farber had pronounced the diamond a diamond, and not merely a diamond, but a diamond worth in his opinion over one hundred thousand dollars.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Question: Had Lieutenant Farber lied?

Answer: Lieutenant Farber was (a) a man of probity, tested in a thousand fires, and (b) he was incorruptible. To (a) and (b) Inspector Richard Queen attested violently, swearing by the beard of his personal Prophet.

Question: Had Lieutenant Farber been mistaken?

Answer: Lieutenant Farber was a celebrated police expert in the field of precious stones. It must be presumed that he knew a real diamond from a piece of glass.

Question: Had it *been* Lieutenant Farber?

Answer: By the same beard of the identical Prophet, it had been Lieutenant Farber and no facsimile.

Conclusion: The diamond Lieutenant Farber had examined immediately preceding the opening of Nash's doors that morning had been the veritable diamond of the dauphin, the doll had been the veritable Dauphin's Doll, and it was this genuine article which Ellery with his own hands had carried into the glass-enclosed fortress and deposited between the authenticated Sergeant Velie's verified feet.

Item: All day—specifically, between the moment the dauphin had been deposited in his niche until the moment he was discovered to be a fraud; that is, during the total period in which a theft-and-substitution was even theoretically possible—no person whatsoever, male or female, adult or child, had set foot within the enclosure except Sergeant Thomas Velie, alias Santa Claus.

Question: Had Sergeant Velie switched dolls, carrying the genuine dauphin concealed in his Santa Claus suit, to be cached for future retrieval or turned over to Comus or a confederate of Comus's, during one of his two departures from the enclosure?

Answer (by Sergeant Velie): (Censored)

Confirmation: Some dozens of persons with police training and specific instruction, not to mention the Queens themselves, Miss Porter, and Attorney Bondling, testified unqualifiedly that Sergeant Velie had not touched the doll, at any time, all day.

Conclusion: Sergeant Velie could not have stolen the Dauphin's Doll.

Item: All those deputized to watch the doll swore that they had done so without lapse or hindrance the everlasting day; moreover, that at no time had anything touched the doll—human or mechanical—either from inside or outside the enclosure.

Question: The human vessel being frail, could those so swearing have been in error? Could their attention have wandered

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

through weariness, boredom, *et cetera*?

Answer: Yes; but not all at the same time, by the laws of probability. And during the only two diversions of the danger period, Ellery himself testified that he had kept his eyes on the dauphin and that nothing whatsoever had approached or threatened it.

Item: Despite all of the foregoing, at the end of the day they had found the real dauphin gone and a worthless copy in its place.

"It's brilliantly, unthinkably clever," said Ellery at last. "A master illusion. For, of course, it *was* an illusion."

"Witchcraft," groaned the Inspector.

"Mass mesmerism," suggested Nikki Porter.

"Mass bird gravel," growled the Sergeant.

Two hours later Ellery spoke again.

"So Comus had a worthless copy of the dauphin all ready for the switch," he muttered. "It's a world-famous dollie, been illustrated countless times, minutely described, photographed . . . All ready for the switch, but how did he make it? How? How?"

"You said that," said the Sergeant, "forty-two times."

"The bells are tolling," sighed Nikki, "but for whom? Not for us." And indeed, while they slumped there, Time, which Seneca named father of truth, had crossed the threshold of Christmas; and Nikki looked alarmed, for as that glorious song of old came upon the midnight clear, a great light spread from Ellery's eyes and beatified the whole contorted countenance—so that peace sat there, the peace that approximateth understanding; and he threw back his head and laughed with the merriment of an innocent child.

"Hey," said Sergeant Velie, staring.

"Son," began Inspector Queen, half rising from his armchair, when the telephone rang.

"Beautiful!" roared Ellery. "Oh, exquisite! How did Comus make the switch, eh? Nikki—"

"From somewhere," said Nikki, handing him the telephone receiver, "a voice is calling, and if you ask me it's saying 'Comus.' Why not ask him?"

"Comus," whispered the Inspector, shrinking.

"Comus," echoed the Sergeant, baffled.

"Comus?" said Ellery heartily. "How nice. Hello there! Congratulations."

"Why, thank you," said the familiar deep and hollow voice. "I called to express my appreciation for a wonderful day's sport and to wish you the merriest kind of Yuletide."

"You anticipate a rather merry Christmas yourself, I take it."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"*Laeti triumphantes*," said Comus jovially.

"And the orphans?"

"They have my best wishes. But I won't detain you, Queen. If you'll look at the doormat outside your apartment door, you'll find on it—in the spirit of the season—a little gift, with the compliments of Comus. Will you remember me to Inspector Queen and Attorney Bondling?"

Ellery hung up, smiling.

On the doormat he found the true Dauphin's Doll, intact except for a contemptible detail. The jewel in the little golden crown was missing.

"It was," said Ellery later, over pastrami sandwiches, "a fundamentally simple problem. All great illusions are. A valuable object is placed in full view in the heart of an impenetrable enclosure; it is watched hawkishly by dozens of thoroughly screened and reliable trained persons; it is never out of their view; it is not once touched by human hand or any other agency; and yet, at the expiration of the danger period, it is gone—exchanged for a worthless copy.

"Wonderful. Amazing. It defies the imagination. Actually, it's susceptible—like all magical hocus-pocus—to immediate solution if only one is able—as I was not—to ignore the wonder and stick to the fact. But then, the wonder is there for precisely that purpose: to stand in the way of the fact.

"What is the fact?" continued Ellery, helping himself to a dill pickle. "The fact is that between the time the doll was placed on the exhibit platform and the time the theft was discovered no one and no thing touched it. Therefore between the time the doll was placed on the platform and the time the theft was discovered *the dauphin could not have been stolen*. It follows, simply and inevitably, that the dauphin must have been stolen *outside that period*.

"Before the period began? No. I placed the authentic dauphin inside the enclosure with my own hands; at or about the beginning of the period, then, no hand but mine had touched the doll—not even, you'll recall, Lieutenant Farber's.

"Then the dauphin must have been stolen after the period closed."

Ellery brandished half the pickle. "And who," he demanded solemnly, "is the only one besides myself who handled that doll after the period closed and before Lieutenant Farber pronounced the diamond to be paste? *The only one?*"

The Inspector and the Sergeant exchanged puzzled glances, and Nikki looked blank.

"Why, Mr. Bondling," said Nikki, "and he doesn't count."

"He counts very much, Nikki," said Ellery, reaching for the mustard, "because the facts say Bondling stole the dauphin at that time."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Bondling!" The Inspector paled.

"I don't get it," complained Sergeant Velie.

"Ellery, you must be wrong," said Nikki. "At the time Mr. Bondling grabbed the doll off the platform, the theft had already taken place. It was the worthless copy he picked up."

"That," said Ellery, reaching for another sandwich, "was the focal point of his illusion. How do we know it was the worthless copy he picked up? Why, he said so. Simple, eh? He said so, and like the dumb bunnies we were, we took his unsupported word as gospel."

"That's right!" mumbled his father. "We didn't actually examine the doll till quite a few seconds later."

"Exactly," said Ellery in a munchy voice. "There was a short period of beautiful confusion, as Bondling knew there would be. I yelled to the boys to follow and grab Santa Claus—I mean, the Sergeant here. The detectives were momentarily demoralized. You, Dad, were stunned. Nikki looked as if the roof had fallen in. I essayed an excited explanation. Some detectives ran; others milled around.

"And while all this was happening—during those few moments when nobody was watching the genuine doll in Bondling's hand because everyone thought it was a fake—Bondling calmly slipped it into one of his greatcoat pockets and from the other produced the worthless copy which he'd been carrying there all day. When I did turn back to him, it was the copy I grabbed from his hand. And his illusion was complete.

"I know," said Ellery dryly. "It's rather on the let-down side. That's why illusionists guard their professional secrets so closely—knowledge is disenchantment. No doubt the incredulous amazement aroused in his periwigged London audience by Comus the French conjuror's dematerialization of his wife from the top of a table would have suffered the same fate if he'd revealed the trap door through which she had dropped. Sergeant, have another pastrami."

"Seems like funny chow to be eating early Christmas morning," said the Sergeant, reaching. Then he stopped. Then he said, "Bondling," and shook his head.

"Now that we know it was Bondling," said the Inspector, who had recovered a little, "it's a cinch to get that diamond back. He hasn't had time to dispose of it yet. I'll just give downtown a buzz—"

"Wait, Dad," said Ellery.

"Wait for what?"

"Whom are you going to sic the dogs on?"

"What?"

"You're going to call Headquarters, get a warrant, and so on. Who's your man?"

The Inspector felt his head. "Why . . . Bondling, didn't you say?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"It might be wise," said Ellery, "to specify his alias."..

"Alias?" said Nikki. "Does he have one?"

"What alias, son?"

"Comus."

"Comus?"

"Yes," said Ellery, "Comus."

"Oh, come off it," said Nikki. "How could Bondling be Comus when Bondling was with us all day and Comus kept making disguised appearances all over the place—that Santa who gave me the note in front of the bank, the old man who kidnaped Lance Morganstern, the fat man with the mustache who snatched Mrs. Rafferty's purse."

"Yeah," said the Sergeant. "How?"

"These illusions die hard," said Ellery. "Wasn't it Comus who phoned a few minutes ago to rag me about the theft? Wasn't it Comus who said he'd left the stolen dauphin—minus the diamond—on our doormat? Therefore Comus is Bondling.

"I told you Comus never does anything without a good reason," said Ellery. "Why did 'Comus' announce to 'Bondling' that he was *going* to steal the Dauphin's Doll? Bondling told us that because he wanted us to believe he and Comus were separate individuals. He wanted us to watch for *Comus* and take *Bondling* for granted. In tactical execution of this strategy, Bondling provided us with three 'Comus'-appearances during the day—obviously, confederates.

"Yes," said Ellery, "I think, Dad, you'll find on backtracking that the great thief you've been trying to catch for five years has been a respectable estate attorney on Park Row all the time, shedding his quiddities and his quillets at night in favor of the soft shoe and the dark lantern. And now he'll have to exchange them all for a number and a grilled door. Well, well, it couldn't have happened at a more appropriate season; there's an old English proverb that says the Devil makes his Christmas pie of lawyers' tongues. Nikki, pass the pastrami."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **HUGH PENTECOST**

TITLE: ***No Witnesses on the Waterfront***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Gary Bayne

LOCALE: New York City

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *The whole North River knew that Champagne Charlie was out to get Little Boy Blue . . . yes, a killer was not far away, waiting.*

GARY BAYNE SAT AT HIS DESK, THE morning paper spread out in front of him, with its unbelievable headline and the smiling picture of Chavez leering up at him.

The phone rang. It was only a quarter past nine and there had already been more than half a dozen calls of congratulation.

"Your wife calling, Mr. Bayne," the switchboard operator said.

"Put her through."

Sally's voice was unsteady with excitement. "Darling!" she said. "Oh, Gary, darling!"

"Sleepyhead. You finally woke up," he said.

"You knew and you didn't wake me!" she said reproachfully.

"You didn't get to sleep until nearly four," he said.

"But for this!" she said. "I feel like such a heel getting joy from a thing like this—but oh, Gary, it's so wonderful!"

"We'll celebrate when I get home tonight," he said, with a curious lack of enthusiasm. "Now I've got to get to work, woman."

He put down the phone and began reading the newspaper story over for what must have been the tenth time.

"CHAMPAGNE CHAVEZ FOUND DEAD," the headline announced, and the story went on:

"During dredging operations at Pier 81 in the North River yester-

Copyright 1960 by Hugh Pentecost; originally titled, "The Ghost of Champagne Charlie."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

day, conducted by the firm of Trowbridge, Gallagher and Stockwell, the skeletal remains of a man, embedded in a barrel of cement, were brought to the surface. An identification bracelet and a diamond ring still entangled in the bones ended a year-long man hunt for Charles Chavez, known as Champagne Charlie Chavez, notorious waterfront gangster.

"Chavez, member of an extortion and murder ring on the New York waterfront, was the only member of a twelve-man gang to escape a net spread by the District Attorney's office and the Waterfront Commission just a year ago. Chavez seemed to have disappeared from the face of the earth and has been the object of a dogged police search both here and abroad. Yesterday's gruesome discovery at Pier 81 makes it apparent that Chavez was the victim of waterfront enemies.

"Chavez, who acquired his nickname of Champagne Charlie because of lavish spending in New York night clubs . . ."

Gary Bayne turned away from the paper. He took his wallet out of his pocket and removed a folded postcard from among a collection of credit cards and his driver's license. It bore a French stamp. There was a picture of the Eiffel Tower on one side of the card. On the blank side was Gary's name and address and a one-line message:

"It won't be long now, chum. C.C."

The posting date was just ten days ago. It was the last of a series of such postcards Gary had received over a twelve-month period. He had never shown them to Sally. Imagining danger was bad enough, but there had been no point in making it unbearable for her by revealing that the fears which kept her from sleeping at night were based on reality and not just female "instinct" . . .

Gary walked down the corridor to George Huggins' office. Huggins was the D.A.'s executive assistant. He was a pleasant, mild-mannered man, made to look a little owlish by shell-rimmed glasses. He gave Gary a smile and waved to the chair beside his desk.

"Obviously you've seen the papers," he said.

Gary nodded.

"I've been talking to the boss," Huggins said. "We're both agreed that you've earned a vacation, Gary. Why don't you and Sally take off somewhere for a month or six weeks? Cruise or something?"

"So it *is* a fake?" Gary said. He lit a cigarette, surprised at the steadiness of his hands. "I didn't buy it." He tossed the French postcard onto Huggins' desk. "Mailed ten days ago. He wouldn't be a skeleton yet, not if all the lobsters in New England got at him."

"The skeleton is genuine enough," Huggins said, "but, of course, it could have come from a graveyard somewhere."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Chavez had his own graveyards," Gary said. "Vacant lots in Queens and Brooklyn."

"The identification bracelet and the ring," Huggins said. "They hadn't been in the water for any length of time. That was the tip-off."

"We're supposed to write the case off the books," Gary said. "We're supposed to stop looking for him. Which means he's here."

"So the vacation makes real sense," Huggins said, "considering that you are Target Number One."

The ash fell off Gary's cigarette and dribbled down his shirt front. He didn't notice it. His pale blue eyes were squinted against the smoke.

"I can't go on living this way, George," he said. "For twelve months now, every day, I've felt him behind me on the street, or staring at me from the windows of a house, or waiting for me in an alley. I had the postcards, which seemed to indicate he was in Europe, but I was never sure they weren't sent by some friend of his to throw me off guard. Now that I know for certain he's here, I can't run, George."

"Sally knows all this?"

"No! And she mustn't. But I want your help with her. Chavez might very easily strike at her first. He knows what that would do to me."

"Of course, we'll cover her," Huggins said. "What do you propose to do?"

"You're not breaking the story that you know the skeleton is a fake?"

"No. We'll let him think he's safe."

"Good. And I'll let him know I think I'm safe. But I'll arrange for a meeting."

"How?"

"Just let him know where I'll be at a certain time," Gary said. He gave Huggins a crooked little smile. "Seen any Westerns on TV lately, George? Well, this is going to be a walkdown—a big-city walkdown!"

The bartender at Mahoney's on West Fourteenth Street gave Gary a curious, pale-faced look as he ordered a beer.

"Haven't seen you around in some time, Mr. Bayne," he said.

Gary grinned. "The office has kept me out of this part of town. Figured it wasn't healthy with Champagne on the loose."

"Yeah, I can imagine," the man said.

"Now that we know he's cashed in his chips . . ." Gary raised his glass. "Here's how!"

"Something new in this neck of the woods?" the bartender asked.

"Little high-powered pilferage on Pier X." Gary prayed the bartender wouldn't be suspicious of such loose talk.

That bartender had known him more than a year ago as George Blue, called Little Boy Blue by his friends. Little Boy Blue had been a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

crony of Champagne Charlie's and apparently a member of Champagne's mob. Then one day the roof fell in on Champagne's mob, and it was revealed that Little Boy Blue was a D.A.'s man.

Little Boy Blue had sprung the fatal trap from which Champagne had escaped. The big one got away. Little Boy Blue was forced to testify in court against eleven other killers, and his masquerade was over on the waterfront. He was Gary Bayne, the D.A.'s man, marked for death by Champagne Charlie Chavez.

"Must be a load off your mind," the bartender said, "Champagne turning up in cement boots."

"A big load," Gary said.

In Pietro's Pizza Palace, near the Italian Line piers, Gary ordered a large anchovy pie and a cup of coffee. The old man who ran the joint kept staring at him from his place behind the cash register.

You could smell it in the air, Gary thought. They all knew the truth about Champagne. They wondered at Gary's presence here. The news of Champagne's death had made it possible for him to be reassigned in this area: that's what they thought—or what Gary hoped they thought.

"Long time no see," Pietro said.

"Long time no healthy," Gary said.

"You sightseein', or somethin'?"

"Too many itchy fingers on Pier X."

Pietro laughed, a short, nervous laugh. "You're a great kidder, Mr. Bayne. You wouldn't tell me that if it was so."

Gary winked. "Maybe I tell you that so you'll think it isn't so because it is so," he said. "See you, Pietro."

He was aware that Pietro stared at him through the flyspecked plate-glass window as he started down the block. Gary's left hand closed over the box of extra shells for the police special which he carried in his jacket pocket. The feeling of the small hairs rising on the back of his neck was there, as it had been for months.

A killer was not far away, waiting.

Trucks roared along the waterfront and turned into the piers. Longshoremen nudged each other and nodded toward the man who sauntered past. Gary knew that in half an hour the whole North River section would know that Little Boy Blue was back. *Sucker,* they were saying to themselves. *Sucker! He fell for it!*

He dodged across under the West Side Highway to Pier X, breathing in the carbon monoxide from trucks. The watchman, an old-timer named McNamara, saw him coming and stepped out of the mouth of the pier. Thre was nothing doing here this morning—no ship, no work. Staring down the dark tunnel of the pier, Gary saw it was cluttered with cargo, either held for

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

inspection or payment, or waiting to be loaded on a ship.

McNamara knew. You could see it in his watery gray eyes.

"Hi, Mac," Gary said.

"Morning, Mr. Bayne," The old man's eyes shifted nervously.

"Things quiet here?"

"Just for today," McNamara said. "Pier's loaded with cargo, coming and going. Lot of pineapple shipped up on spec. Probably rot right here on the pier. You can smell 'em. *Princess Clara* docks sometime this afternoon to pick up the outgoing. On her way to Mexico."

"Who's the watchman at night?"

"Jerry Laverick. I guss he's new since you were last working this beat, Mr. Bayne."

"Wish it was you," Gary said, reaching in his pocket for a cigarette. "I may be doing a little snooping around after dark. Don't mention it to Laverick. I'll deal with him when the time comes."

"You can count on me, Mr. Bayne."

Gary walked away across the traffic-heavy street, and he could feel the little rivers of sweat running down inside his clothes. The invitation, he felt certain, would be delivered. Sometime after dark Champagne Charlie would be at Pier X.

At five o'clock that afternoon, Gary sat at an enamel-topped table in a little lunchroom across the avenue from Pier X. Longshoremen began to pour off the adjoining piers, the work day over. Some of them headed for nearby saloons and coffeepots, others walked in clusters eastward toward their homes. They were a drab mass of gray-brown-blue men, some old and bent from years of shifting heavy cargo, some young and hopeful of a new kind of future. But they had one thing in common, Gary thought bitterly. A cop was an enemy.

For years now, the Waterfront Commission had been trying to persuade this community of workers that the law was its friend; that, with their cooperation, the extortionists, loan sharks, demanders of kickbacks, even the killers—like Champagne Charlie Chavez—could be driven out of the port.

But still the code of silence prevailed. The D.A.'s office could seldom get witnesses who would testify in court. When it came to a showdown between the law and the outlaws, the waterfront world supported the side of evil—out of fear; out of a long custom and practice. Longshoremen still doubted the safety of their jobs and families, if they took a stand against the criminal powers of their world.

A cop was a cop. Gary Bayne, as Little Boy Blue, had helped to drive out the criminal leeches from this area of the port, but the handful of men who came into the lunchroom saw him, identified him, and gave him cool, hostile nods.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Educate them," the Waterfront Commission said. "We've got to educate them."

Gary sipped cold coffee from his cup. Educate them! The whole North River knew that Champagne Charlie was back, and was out to get Little Boy Blue. He'd have heard from a dozen sources by now that Little Boy Blue would be on Pier X that night, investigating a matter of pilferage. A cop was an enemy.

Champagne Charlie Chavez, swarthy, with long sideburns and a thin, black mustache over cruel lips, lithe as a cobra, would be waiting on Pier X after dark. The world of the waterfront had prepared him for the kill. Gary knew he would probably get it in the back.

A little before six Gary went to the phone booth at the rear of the lunchroom and called Sally.

"Sorry, honey, but I won't be home for supper," he said.

"Trouble?" she asked.

"I thought you were over being worried," he said, "after this morning's news."

"It's been a wonderful day," she said, "knowing you were safe."

He swallowed hard. "I should be home about eleven."

"Take care, darling," Sally said.

"I'm a big boy," he said, trying to make it sound light. And then, when he was disconnected, he whispered into the buzzing dial tone. "I love you, Sally."

The last vestiges of daylight did not disappear over the Jersey shore until nearly nine o'clock. All that time Gary Bayne sat in the little lunchroom opposite Pier X. He could see the open mouth of the pier from there. He could have seen, even after dark, if anyone came or went.

The *Princess Clara* had docked, but her owners, in spite of the permanent need for a quick turnaround, had decided against a night loading and the consequent overtime for the hatch gangs. A few men did come and go on Pier X, probably the ship's crew. But Gary's vantage point was far from foolproof. The pier could be entered from the stringpieces on either side, out of his line of vision.

At nine o'clock, Gary went to the washroom and doused his face in cold water. Then he took his gun out of the shoulder holster he was wearing and made certain of its efficiency and readiness. He looked at himself in the mirror and was surprised at the naturalness of his reflection. It didn't show the tight fear inside him.

The counterman didn't even look up as Gary walked out onto the street. He knew. You could tell it from his elaborate disregard.

The pier was a long dark tunnel with only a few naked light bulbs burning here and there. The watchman, Laverick, was not at his post at the head of the pier. Gary walked slowly to the open mouth and stood

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

there for a moment, his eyes smarting as he squinted into the gloom ahead of him. The smell of pineapples was almost overpowering.

A ship's bell on the *Princess Clara* announced the quarter hour.

For just a moment Gary Bayne considered turning back. After all, why not take a cruise with Sally? Why not leave the job of nailing Champagne Charlie to Huggins and the waterfront police? The answer was there with the questions. There could be no guarantee. The waterfront world would keep Chavez informed.

If they went on a cruise, he might suddenly come face to face with Chavez on the promenade deck of the cruise ship. And Sally would be involved. Also, there would be a few days to live through—or to die in—while they waited for a cruise ship to take them. It had to be now, the only certain wind-up.

Gary Bayne was not a praying man, but he prayed now to Whoever. "Let me have an even chance!"

Then he stopped being a frightened citizen. He became a cop, with trained reflexes and skills.

He stepped forward into the dim tunnel and moved right, to the north wall of the pier. Not in the back, he told himself. With his back to the wall, he inched along sideways, his gun ready, his senses receptively raw.

He stared hard through the gloom, right and left. There were so many places for Chavez to wait his moment, hidden in the jumble of cargo—the pineapples, crates of machinery outbound for Mexico, boxes of artificial flowers from Japan, striped bags of coffee from Brazil.

There was a curious background of sound from the dark hull of the *Clara,* moored on the opposite side of the pier—faint creaks and groans as though she lived and breathed.

It was cool on the pier, with the wind blowing in from the apron, but sweat dribbled down inside Gary's clothes. Once he thought he heard a soft chuckle, and his imagination gave it a diabolical echo.

He had gone half the length of the pier, perhaps five hundred feet, when the darkness was transformed into brilliant light. Floodlights suddenly blazed into being.

Gary stood for a moment flattened against the wall, feeling like a butterfly pinned to a mat. A perfect target.

A voice, a soft, half-laughing voice, came over a public-address system he knew was located in the pier superintendent's office.

"Behind those coffee bags, just to your right, Mr. Bayne!"

Not Chavez!

It was a nightmare, because he could have sworn it was the voice of the surly bartender at Mahoney's.

Gary, his gun at the ready, faced the stack of striped coffee bags.

"He's movin' to the right, Mr. Bayne," another voice said, over the speaker.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Nightmare of nightmares! Surely that was old McNamara, the day watchman.

Then another voice—a never-to-be-forgotten voice—the voice of Champagne Charlie. This voice not on the speaker.

"You double-crossing . . ." A string of obscenity in English and Spanish blew down the pier on the wind from the apron.

"He's gonna make a break for it, Mr. Bayne!" A third voice in the nightmare—the voice of Pietro, the Pizza Palace proprietor.

Out from behind the coffee bags, like an apache dancer pushed on stage from the wings, Champagne Charlie appeared, whirling, looking all around him, screaming his hate. There was a long, thin knife in his right hand. Gary was to have died silently!

"Chavez! Hold it!" Gary shouted.

Chavez, the killer, pirouetted round and round, looking for an avenue of escape. There were so many places into which he could have darted, and yet he stayed there, center stage, turning and turning.

Then Gary's eyes penetrated the shadows and he saw men, forty or fifty men, in a wide, loose circle. Some of them were longshoremen, armed with cargo hooks or iron wrecking bars. There was the bartender from Mahoney's over by the superintendent's office, a small microphone in his hand. There was old McNamara, a pistol aimed at Champagne Charlie. And the voice of the Pizza Palace king came over the speaker.

"Take him, Mr. Bayne. Is better he should stand trial and the whole world should know about him. Take him."

Dazed as an actor who has forgotten his lines when he hears his cue, Gary Bayne moved forward toward the dancing Champagne Charlie.

"Drop the knife, Charlie," Gary said.

Like a child in a terrible tantrum of rage, Champagne Charlie jumped up and down. Then, in a final paroxysm, he threw the knife straight at Gary.

Somehow, Gary managed to duck, though it came fast as a bullet. He heard a soft thud, then the patter of coffee beans dribbling to the floor from a punctured bag.

Chavez came hurtling after his own knife, straight at Gary, clawing and scratching and screaming.

A quick sidestep, a chopping blow with the butt of the gun. Down went Champagne Charlie and lay still. Gary stared at him, hardly believing what had happened.

"I got a set of handcuffs here, Mr. Bayne," old McNamara said softly. There was the click of steel over Chavez' wrists. "Want me to call for a police car?"

Gary raised his eyes and looked at the old man. "Mac! What in God's name . . ."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"We knew what you was up to, Mr. Bayne," the old watchman said. "Everybody knew, I guess. And the word got passed to that weasel just the way you wanted. But there was somethin' you didn't know, Mr. Bayne. For nearly a whole year the people in this section of the port have had a decent life, free from fear. That was thanks to you, Mr. Bayne. We decided not to let you lose, that's all."

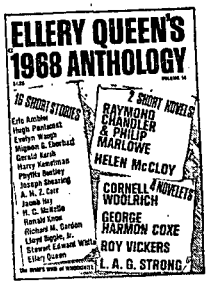
A warm feeling swept over Gary. *"Educate them!"* the Waterfront Commission had said. *"We've got to educate them."*

"Mac," Gary said, and his fingers squeezed the old man's shoulder. He turned to thank the others.

And there was no one. There are never any witnesses on the waterfront.

Gary reached down and yanked a dazed Champagne Charlie to his feet. "Call for that police car, Mac," he said. "I've got to get home."

"Sure," Mac said. "The missus will feel easier, I guess."



For the best in mystery reading

ELLERY QUEEN'S
1968 ANTHOLOGY
$1.25 per copy

ELLERY QUEEN'S ANTHOLOGY / 505 PARK AVE. / NEW YORK, N. Y. 10022

Please send me _____ copies of ELLERY QUEEN'S 1968 ANTHOLOGY—Volume 14. I am enclosing $1.25 for each copy, plus $.25 for postage and handling. EQ-1-68

Name _____
(Please print)

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* Father Crumlish story by

ALICE SCANLAN REACH

Father Francis Xavier Crumlish was constantly battling the Devil in the impoverished parish of St. Brigid's, and while the good pastor lost more than one round of the perennial fight with his adversary, Father Crumlish seldom gave way to despair—his flock needed him too much. But this Christmas the old priest had all he could do to maintain his faith in his fellow creatures: there was old Charley accused of murder, with the case against him so strong that the pastor felt helpless; there were the sad but annoying disappearances of statuettes from the crib of the Saviour's Nativity . . . Father Crumlish has a heart the size of Christmas, and a soul to match . . .

FATHER CRUMLISH CELEBRATES CHRISTMAS

by ALICE SCANLAN REACH

"EAT THAT AND YOU'LL BE UP ALL night with one of your stomach gas attacks." Emma Catt's voice boomed out from the doorway of what she considered to be her personal sanctuary—the kitchen of St. Brigid's rectory.

Caught in the act of his surreptitious mission, Father Francis Xavier Crumlish hastily withdrew the arthritic fingers of his right hand which had been poised to enfold one of several dozen cookies cooling on the wide, old-fashioned table.

"I—I was just thinking to myself that a crumb or two would do no harm," he murmured, conscious of the guilty flush seeping into the seams, tucks, and gussets of his face.

"It would seem to me that a man of the cloth would be the first to put temptation behind him," Emma observed tartly as she strode across the worn linoleum flooring. "Particularly a man of your age," she added, giving him a meaningful look.

The pastor swallowed a heavy sigh. After Emma had arrived to take charge of St. Brigid's household chores some 22 years ago, he had soon learned to his sorrow that her culinary feats were largely confined to bland puddings, poached prunes, and a concoction which she

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

called "Irish Stew" and which was no more than a feeble attempt to disguise the past week's leftovers.

So he was most agreeably surprised one day when Emma miraculously produced a batch of cookies of such flavorful taste and texture that the priest mentally forgave her all her venial sins. And since it was Father Crumlish's nature to share his few simple pleasures with others, he promptly issued instructions that, once a year, Emma should bake as many of the cookies as the parish's meager budget would allow. As a result, although St. Brigid's pastor and his housekeeper were on extra-short rations from Thanksgiving until Christmas Eve, many a parishioner's otherwise cheerless Christmas Day was brightened by a bag of the sugar-and-spice delicacies.

Now, today, as the priest quickly left the kitchen area to avoid any further allusions to his ailments and his advancing years, the ringing of the telephone was entirely welcome. He hurried down the hallway to his office and picked up the receiver.

"St. Brigid's."

"It's Tom, Father."

Father Crumlish recognized the voice of Lieutenant Thomas Patrick "Big Tom" Madigan of Lake City's police force and realized, from the urgency in the policeman's tone, that his call was not a social one.

"I'm at the Liberty Office Building," Madigan said in a rush. "A guy's sitting on a ledge outside the top-story window. Says he's going to jump. If I send a car for you—"

"I'll be waiting at the curb, Tom," Father interrupted and hung up the phone.

"Big Tom" Madigan was waiting outside the elderly office building when Father Crumlish arrived some minutes later. Quickly he ushered the priest through the emergency police and fire details and the crowd of curious onlookers who were gazing in awe at the scarecrow figure perched on a ledge high above the street.

"Do you know the man, Tom?" Father asked. He followed the broad-shouldered policeman into the building lobby and, together, they entered a self-service elevator.

"And so do you, Father," Madigan said as he pressed the elevator button. "He's one of your people. Charley Abbott."

"God bless us!" the pastor exclaimed. "What do you suppose set Charley off this time?" He sighed. "The poor lad's been in and out of sanitariums half a dozen times in his thirty years. But this is the first time he's ever tried to do away with himself."

"This may not be just one of Abbott's loony notions," Madigan replied grimly. "Maybe he's got a good reason for wanting to jump off that ledge."

"What do you mean, Tom?"

"Last week a man named John

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Everett was found murdered in his old farmhouse out in Lake City Heights. He was a bachelor, lived alone, no relatives—"

"I read about it," Father interrupted impatiently. "What's that got to do—"

"We haven't been able to come up with a single clue," Madigan broke in, "until half an hour ago. One of my detectives, Dennis Casey, took an anonymous phone call from a man who said that if we wanted to nab Everett's murderer we should pick up the daytime porter at the Liberty Office Building."

"That's Charley," Father nodded, frowning. "I myself put in a good word for him for the job."

"Casey came over here on a routine check," Madigan went on as the elevator came to a halt and he and the priest stepped out into the corridor. "He showed Abbott his badge, said he was investigating Everett's murder, and wanted to ask a few questions. Abbott turned pale—looked as if he was going to faint, Casey says. Then he made a dash for the elevator, rode it up to the top floor, and climbed out the corridor window onto the ledge."

"But surely now, Tom," Father protested, "you can't be imagining that Charley Abbott had a hand in that killing? Why, you know as well as I that, for all his peculiar ways, Charley's gentle as a lamb."

"All I know," Madigan replied harshly, "is that when we tried to ask him a few questions, he bolted." He ran a hand over his crisp, curly brown hair. "And I know that innocent men don't run."

"Innocent or guilty," Father Crumlish said, "the man's in trouble. Take me to him, Tom."

When Father Crumlish entered the priesthood more than forty years before, he never imagined that he was destined to spend most of those years in St. Brigid's parish—that weary bedraggled section of Lake City's waterfront where destitution and despair, avarice and evil, walked hand in hand. And although, on the occasions when he lost a battle with the Devil, he too sometimes teetered on the brink of despair, he unfailingly rearmed himself with his intimate, hard-won knowledge of his people.

But now, as the old priest leaned out the window and caught sight of the man seated on the building's ledge, his confidence was momentarily shaken. Charley Abbott had the appearance and demeanor of a stranger. The man's usually slumped, flaccid shoulders were rigid with purpose; his slack mouth and chin were set in taut hard lines; and in place of his normal attitude of wavering indecision, there was an aura about him of implacable determination.

There was not a doubt in Father Crumlish's mind that Abbott intended to take the fatal plunge into eternity. The priest took a deep breath and silently said a prayer.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Charley," he then called out mildly, "it's Father Crumlish. I'm right here close to you, lad. At the window."

Abbott gave no indication that he'd heard his pastor's voice.

"Can you hear me, Charley?"

No response.

"I came up here to remind you that we have been through a lot of bad times together," Father continued conversationally. "And together we'll get through whatever it is that's troubling you now."

The priest waited for a moment, hoping to elicit some indication that Abbott was aware of his presence. But the man remained silent and motionless, staring into space. Father decided to try another approach.

"I've always been proud of you, Charley," Father said. "And never more so than when you were just a tyke and ran in the fifty-yard dash at our Annual Field Day Festival." He sighed audibly. "Ah, but that's so many years ago, and my memory plays leprechaun's tricks. I can't recall for the life of me, lad—did you come in second or third?"

Again Father waited, holding his breath. Actually he remembered the occasion clearly. The outcome had been a major triumph in his attempts to bring a small spark of reality into his young parishioner's dreamy, listless life.

Suddenly Abbott's long legs, which were dangling aimlessly over the perilous ledge, stiffened, twitched. Slowly he turned his head and focused his bleak eyes on the priest.

"I—I won!" he said, in the reproachful, defensive voice of a small child.

"I can't hear you, Charley," Father said untruthfully, striving to keep the tremor of relief from his voice. "Could you speak a little louder? Or come a bit closer?"

To Father Crumlish it seemed an eternity before Abbott's shoulders relaxed a trifle, before his deathlike grip on the narrow slab of concrete and steel diminished, before slowly, ever so slowly, the man began to inch his way along the ledge until he came within an arm's reach of the window and the priest. Then he paused and leaned tiredly against the building's brick wall.

"I won," he repeated, this time in a louder and firmer tone.

"I remember now," Father said, never taking his dark blue eyes from his parishioner's pale, distraught face. "So can you tell me why a fellow like yourself, with a fine pair of racing legs, would be hanging them out there in the breeze?"

The knuckles of Charley's hands grasping the ledge whitened. "The cops are going to say I murdered Mr. Everett—" He broke off in agitation.

"Go on, Charley."

"They're going to arrest me. Put me away." Abbott's voice rose hysterically. "And this time it'll be forever. I can't stand that, Father."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Abruptly he turned his head away from the priest and made a move as if to rise to his feet. "I'll kill myself first."

"Stay where you are!" Father Crumlish commanded. "You'll not take your life in the sight of God, with me standing by to have it on my conscience that I wasn't able to save you."

Cowed by Father's forcefulness, Abbott subsided and once more turned his stricken gaze on the pastor's face.

"I want you to look me straight in the eye, Charley," Father said, "and answer my question: as God is your Judge, did you kill the man?"

"No, Father. No!" The man's slight form swayed dangerously. "But nobody will believe me."

Father Crumlish stared fixedly into Abbott's pale blue eyes which were dazed now and dark with desperation. But the pastor also saw in them his parishioner's inherent bewilderment, fear—and his childlike innocence. Poor lad, he thought compassionately. Poor befuddled lad.

"*I* believe you, Charley," he said in a strong voice. "And I give you my word that you'll not be punished for a crime you didn't commit." With an effort the priest leaned further out the window and extended his hand. "Now come with me."

Hesitatingly Abbott glanced down at the priest's outstretched, gnarled fingers.

"My word, Charley."

Abbott sat motionless, doubt and indecision etched on his thin face.

"Give me your hand, lad," Father said gently.

Once again the man raised his eyes until they met the priest's.

"Give me your hand!"

It was a long excruciating moment before Charley released his grip on the ledge, extended a nail-bitten, trembling hand, and permitted the pastor's firm warm clasp to lead him to safety.

It was Father Crumlish's custom to read the *Lake City Times* sports page while consuming his usual breakfast of coddled egg, dry toast, and tea. But this morning he delayed learning how his beloved Giants, and in particular Willie Mays, were faring until he'd read every word of the running story on John Everett's murder.

Considerable space had been devoted to the newest angle on the case—Charley Abbott's threatened suicide after the police had received an anonymous telephone tip and had sought to question him. Abbott, according to the story, had been taken to Lake City Hospital for observation. Meanwhile, the police were continuing their investigation, based on the few facts at their disposal.

To date, John Everett still remained a "mystery man." With the exception of his lawyer, banker, and the representative of a large real es-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tate management concern—and his dealings with all three had been largely conducted by mail or telephone—apparently only a handful of people in Lake City were even aware of the man's existence. As a result, his murder might not have come to light for some time had it not been for two youngsters playing in the wooded area which surrounded Everett's isolated farmhouse. Prankishly peering in a window, they saw his body sprawled on the sparsely furnished living-room floor and notified the police. According to the Medical Examiner, Everett had been dead less than 24 hours. Death was the result of a bullet wound from a .25 automatic.

Although from all appearances Everett was a man of modest means, the story continued, investigation showed that in fact he was extremely wealthy—the "hidden owner" of an impressive amount of real estate in Lake City. Included in his holdings was the Liberty Office Building where Charley Abbott had almost committed suicide.

Frowning, Father Crumlish put down the newspaper and was about to pour himself another cup of tea when the telephone rang. Once again it was Big Tom Madigan—and Father was not surprised. It was a rare day when Madigan failed to "check in" with his pastor—a habit formed years ago when he'd been one of the worst hooligans in the parish and the priest had intervened to save him from reform school. And in circumstances like the present, where one of St. Brigid's parishioners was involved in a crime, the policeman always made sure that Father Crumlish was acquainted with the latest developments.

"I've got bad news, Father," Madigan said, his voice heavy with fatigue.

The priest braced himself.

"Seems Everett decided to demolish quite a few old buildings that he owned. Turn the properties into parking lots. I've got a list of the ones that were going to be torn down and the Liberty is on it." Madigan paused a moment. "In other words, Charley Abbott was going to lose his job. Not for some months, of course, but—"

"Are you trying to tell me that any man would commit murder just because he was going to lose his job?" Father was incredulous.

"Not *any* man. *Charley*. You know that he didn't think his porter's job was menial. To him it was a 'position,' a Big Deal, the most important thing that ever happened to him."

Father Crumlish silently accepted the truth of what Big Tom had said. And yet . . . "But I still can't believe that Charley is capable of murder," he said firmly. "There's something more to all this, Tom."

"You're right, Father, there is," Madigan said. "Abbott lived in the rooming house run by his sister and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

brother-in-law, Annie and Steve Swanson."

"That I know."

"Casey—the detective who tried to question Charley yesterday—went over to the house to do a routine check on Charley's room. Hidden under the carpet, beneath the radiator, he found a recently fired .25 automatic."

The priest caught his breath.

"Casey also found a man's wallet. Empty—except for a driver's license issued to John Everett."

"What will happen to poor Charley now, Tom?" Father finally managed to ask.

"In view of the evidence I'll have to book him on suspicion of murder."

After hanging up the phone, the priest sat, disconsolate and staring into space, until Emma Catt burst into the room, interrupting his troubled thoughts.

"I just went over to church to put some fresh greens on the roof of the crib," Emma reported. "Some of the statuettes have been stolen again."

Wincing at her choice of the word, the pastor brushed at his still-thick, snow-white hair, leaned back in his desk chair, and closed his eyes.

In observance of the Christmas season St. Brigid's church traditionally displayed a miniature crib, or manger, simulating the scene of the Nativity. Statuettes representing the participants in the momentous event were grouped strategically in the stable. And to enhance the setting, boughs of fir, pine, and holly were placed around the simple structure.

So while Father Crumlish was pleased by Emma's attention to the crib's appearance, he also understood the full meaning of her report. It was sad but true that each year, on more than one occasion, some of the statuettes would be missing. But, unlike Emma, Father refused to think of the deed as "stealing." From past experience (sometimes from a sobbing whisper in the Confessional), he knew that some curious child had knelt in front of the crib, stretched out an eager hand, perhaps to caress the Infant, and then . . .

"What's missing this time," the priest asked tiredly.

"The Infant, the First Wise Man, and a lamb."

"Well, no harm done. I'll step around to Herbie's and buy some more."

"It would be cheaper if you preached a sermon on stealing."

" 'They know not what they do'," the old priest murmured as he adjusted his collar and his bifocals, shrugged himself into his shabby overcoat, quietly closed the rectory door behind him, and walked out into the gently falling snow.

Minutes later he opened the door of Herbie's Doll House, a toy and novelty store which had occupied the street floor of an aged three-story frame building on Broad Street as long as the pastor could remember.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

As usual at this time of the year, the store was alive with the shrill voices of excited youngsters as they examined trains, wagons, flaxen-haired dolls, and every imaginable type of Christmas decoration. Presiding over the din was the proprietor, Herbie Morris, a shy, slight man in his late sixties.

Father Crumlish began to wend his way through the crowd, reflecting sadly that most of his young parishioners would be doomed to disappointment on Christmas Day. But in a moment Herbie Morris caught sight of the priest, quickly elbowed a path to his side, and eagerly shook Father's outstretched hand.

"I can see that the Christmas spirit has caught hold of you again this year," Father Crumlish said with a chuckle. "You're a changed man." It was quite true. Herbie Morris' normally pale cheeks were rosy with excitement and his usually dull eyes were shining.

"I know you and all the storekeepers in the parish think I'm a fool to let the kids take over in here like this every Christmas," Herbie said sheepishly but smiling broadly. "You think they rob me blind." He sighed. "You're right. But it's worth it just to see them enjoying themselves—" He broke off, and a momentary shadow crossed his face. "When you have no one—no real home to go to—it gets lonely—" his voice faltered. "Especially at Christmas."

Father Crumlish put an arm around the man's thin shoulder. "It's time you had a paying customer," he said heartily. "I need a few replacements for the crib."

Nodding, Morris drew him aside to a counter filled with statuettes for the manger and Father quickly made his selections. The priest was about to leave when Herbie clasped his arm.

"Father," he said, "I've been hearing a lot about Charley Abbott's trouble. I room with the Swansons."

"I know you do," Father said, "I'm on my way now to see Annie and Steve."

"George says Charley had been acting funny lately."

"George?"

"George Floss. He rooms there too."

"The same fellow who's the superintendent of the Liberty Office Building?" Father was surprised.

"That's him. Charley's boss."

Thoughtfully the priest tucked the box of statuettes under his arm and departed. Although his destination was only a few minutes' walk, it was all of half an hour before he arrived. He'd been detained on the way in order to halt a fist fight or two, admire a new engagement ring, console a recently bereaved widow, and steer homeward a parishioner who'd been trying to drain dry the the beer tap in McCaffery's Tavern. But finally he mounted the steps of a battered house with a sign on the door reading: *Rooms.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He had little relish for his task. Annie and Steve were a disagreeable, quarrelsome pair, and the pastor knew very well that they considered his interest in Charley's welfare all through the years as "meddling." Therefore he wasn't surprised at the look of annoyance of Steve's face when he opened the door.

"Oh, it's you, Father," Steve said ungraciously. "C'mon in. Annie's in the kitchen."

Silently Father followed the short, barrel-chested man, who was clad in winter underwear and a pair of soiled trousers, down a musty hallway. Annie was seated at the kitchen table peeling potatoes. She was a scrawny, pallid-complexioned woman who, Father knew, was only in her mid-forties. But stringy gray hair and deep lines of discontent crisscrossing her face made her appear to be much older. Now, seeing her visitor, she started to wipe her hands on her stained apron and get to her feet. A word from the pastor deterred her.

"I suppose you've come about Charley," she said sulkily.

"Ain't nothing you can do for him this time, Father," Steve said with a smirk. "This time they got him for good—and good riddance."

"Shut up," Annie snapped, shooting her husband a baleful glance.

"First time the crazy fool ever had a decent-paying job," Steve continued, ignoring her. "And what does he do?" He cocked his thumb and forefinger. "Gets a gun and—"

"Shut up, I said!" Annie's face flamed angrily.

"Hiya, Father," a jovial voice interrupted from the doorway. "You here to referee?"

Father turned and saw that the tall burly man entering the kitchen was one of the stray lambs in his flock—George Floss. Murmuring a greeting, the priest noticed that Floss was attired in a bathrobe and slippers.

"It's my day off," George volunteered, aware of Father's scrutiny. He yawned widely before his heavy-jowled face settled into a grin. "So I went out on the town last night."

"That explains your high color," Father remarked dryly. He turned back to the table where Annie and Steve sat glowering at each other. "Now if you can spare a moment from your bickering," he suggested, "maybe you can tell me what happened to set Charley off again."

Steve pointed a finger at Floss. "He'll tell you."

"Charley was doing fine," George said as he poured a cup of coffee from a pot on the stove. "Didn't even seem to take it too hard—at least, not at first—when I told him he was going to be out of a job."

"*You* told him?" the priest said sharply.

"Why, sure," Floss replied with an important air. "I'm the Super at the Liberty building. Soon as I knew the old dump was going to be torn down, I told everybody on

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the maintenance crew that they'd be getting the ax. Me too." He scowled and his face darkened. "A stinking break. There aren't too many good Super jobs around town."

He gulped some coffee and then brightened. "Of course it won't be for some time yet. That's what I kept telling Charley. But I guess it didn't sink in. He started worrying and acting funny—" He broke off with a shrug.

"You haven't heard the latest, George," Steve said. "That cop—Casey—was here nosing around Charley's room. Found a gun and the Everett guy's wallet."

"No kidding!" Floss's eyes widened in surprise. He shook his head and whistled.

"Gun, wallet, no matter what that cop found," Annie shrilled, waving the paring knife in her hand for emphasis, "I don't believe it. Charley may be a little feeble-minded, but he's no murderer—"

The air was suddenly pierced by a loud and penetrating wail. In an upstairs bedroom a child was crying.

"Now see what you've done," Steve said disgustedly. "Started the brat bawling."

Annie gave a potato a vicious stab with her knife. "Go on up and quiet her."

"Not me," Steve retorted with a defiant shake of his balding head. "That's your job."

"I've got enough jobs, cooking and cleaning around here. It won't kill you to take care of the kid once in a while."

Father Crumlish had stood in shocked silence during the stormy scene. But now he found his tongue.

"It's ashamed you should be," he said harshly, turning his indignant dark blue eyes first on Annie, then on Steve. "When I baptized your little Mary Ann four years ago, I told both of you that you were blessed to have a child at your age and after so many years. Is this disgraceful behavior the way you give thanks to the good Lord? And is this home life the best you can offer the poor innocent babe?"

He took a deep breath to cool his temper. Annie and Steve sat sullen and wordless. The only sound in the silence was the child's crying.

"I'll go and see what's eating her," George offered, obviously glad to escape from the scene.

"I've an errand to do," Father told the Swansons. "But mind you," he held up a warning finger, "I'll be back before long to have another word or two with you."

Turning on his heel, he crossed the kitchen floor, walked down the hallway, and let himself out the door. But before he was halfway down the steps to the street, he heard Annie's and Steve's strident voices raised in anger again. And above the din he was painfully aware of the plaintive, persistent sound of the crying child.

Lieutenant Madigan was seated

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

at his desk engrossed in a sheaf of papers when Father Crumlish walked into headquarters.

"Sit down, Father," Big Tom said sympathetically. "You look tired. And worried."

Irritated, the pastor clicked his tongue against his upper plate. He disliked being told that he looked tired and worried; he knew very well that he *was* tired and worried, and that was trouble enough. He considered remaining on his feet, stating his business succinctly, and then being on his way. But the chair next to Madigan's desk looked too inviting. He eased himself into it, suppressing a sigh of relief.

"I know all this is rough on you, Father," Madigan continued in a kind tone. "But facts are facts." He paused, extracted one of the papers in front of him, and handed it to the priest.

Father Crumlish read it slowly. It was a report on the bullet which had killed John Everett; the bullet definitely had been fired from the gun found in Charley Abbott's room. Silently the pastor placed the report on Big Tom's desk.

"This is one of those cases that are cut and dried," the policeman said. "One obvious suspect, one obvious motive." He shifted his gaze away from the bleak look on Father's face. "But you know that with his mental record Charley will never go to prison."

Abruptly Father Crumlish got to his feet.

"Can you tell me where I'll find Detective Dennis Casey?" he asked.

Madigan stared in astonishment. "Third door down the hall. But why—?"

Father Crumlish had already slipped out the door, closed it behind him, and a moment later he was seated beside Detective Casey's desk. Then, in response to the priest's request, Casey selected a manila folder from his files.

"Here's my report on the anonymous phone call, Father," he said obligingly. "Not much to it, as you can see."

A glance at the typed form confirmed that the report contained little information that Father didn't already have.

"I was hoping there might be more," the pastor said disappointedly. "I know you've been on this case since the beginning and I thought to myself that maybe there was something that might have struck you about the phone call. Something odd in the man's words, perhaps." Father paused and sighed. "Well then, maybe you can tell me about your talk with Charley. Exactly what you said to him—"

"Wait a minute, Father," Casey interrupted. He ran a hand through his carrot-hued hair. "Now that you mention it, I *do* remember something odd about that call. I remember hearing a funny sound. Just before the guy hung up."

"Yes?" Father waited hopefully for the detective to continue.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Casey's brows drew together as he tried to recall.

"It was a sort of whining. A cry, maybe." Suddenly his eyes lit up. "Yeah, that's it! It sounded like a baby—a kid—crying."

As Father Crumlish wearily started up the steps to the rectory door, his left foot brushed against a small patch of ice buried beneath the new-fallen snow. He felt himself slipping, sliding, and he stretched out a hand to grasp the old wrought-iron railing and steady himself. As he did, the package of statuettes, which he'd been carrying all these long hours, fell from under his arm and tumbled to the sidewalk.

"Hellfire!"

Gingerly Father bent down to retrieve the package. At that moment St. Brigid's chimes rang out. Six o'clock! Only two hours before Evening Devotions, the priest realized in dismay as he straightened and stood erect. And in even less time his parishioners would be arriving at church to kneel down at the crib, light their candles, and say their prayers.

Well, Father thought, he would have to see to it that they wouldn't be disappointed, that there would be nothing amiss in the scene of the Nativity. Moments later he stood in front of the crib and unwrapped the package. To his chagrin he discovered that the tumble to the sidewalk had caused one of the lambs to lose its head and one leg. But Herbie Morris could easily repair it, Father told himself as he stuffed the broken lamb into his pocket and proceeded to put his replacements in position. First, in the center of the crib, the Infant. Next, to the left, the First Wise Man. And then, close to the Babe, another unbroken lamb that he'd purchased.

Satisfied with his handiwork, Father knelt down and gazed at the peaceful tableau before him. Ordinarily the scene would have evoked a sense of serenity. But the priest's heart was heavy. He couldn't help but think that it was going to be a sad Christmas for Charley Abbott. And that the man's prospects for the future were even worse. Moreover, Father couldn't erase the memory of what he'd seen and heard at the Swansons—the anger, bitterness, selfishness, and, yes, even the cruelty.

Hoping to dispel his disquieting thoughts, the pastor started to close his eyes. But a slight movement in the crib distracted him. He stared in astonishment as he saw that a drop of moisture had appeared on the face of the Infant and had begun to trickle slowly down the pink waxen cheeks.

Even as he watched, fascinated, another drop appeared—and then the priest quickly understood the reason for the seeming phenomenon. The greens that Emma had placed on the roof of the stable had begun to lose their resilience in the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

steam heat of the church. The fir, pine, and holly boughs were drooping, shedding moisture on the face of the Child . . .

In the flickering rosy glow of the nearby vigil lights it struck the priest that the scene seemed almost real—as if the Child were alive and crying. As if He were weeping for all the people in the world. All the poor, lonely, homeless—

Father Crumlish stiffened. A startled expression swept over his face. For some time he knelt, alert and deep in thought, while his expression changed from astonishment to realization and, finally, to sadness. Then he rose from his knees, made his way to the rectory office, and dialed police headquarters.

"Could you read me that list you have of the buildings that John Everett was going to have torn down?" Father said when Madigan's voice came on the wire. The policeman complied.

"That's enough, Tom," the priest interrupted after a moment. "Now tell me, lad, will you be coming to Devotions tonight? I've a call to make and I thought, with this snow, you might give me a lift."

"Glad to, Father." Suspicion crept into Madigan's voice. "But if you're up to something—"

The pastor brought the conversation to an abrupt end by hanging up.

Herbie Morris was on the verge of locking up The Doll House when Father Crumlish and Big Tom walked in.

"Can you give this a bit of glue, Herbie?" Father asked as he handed the storekeeper the broken lamb.

"Forget it, Father," Herbie said, shrugging. "Help yourself to a new one."

"No need. I'm sure you can fix this one and it'll do fine."

Then, as Herbie began to administer to the statuette, the pastor walked over to a display of flaxen-haired dolls and leaned across the counter to select one. But the doll eluded his grasp and toppled over. The motion caused it to close its eyes, open its mouth, and emit the realistic sound of a child crying.

"I see your telephone is close by," Father said, pointing to the instrument on a counter across the aisle. "So it's little wonder that Detective Casey thought he heard a real child crying while you were on the phone with him at headquarters. One of these dolls must have fallen over just as you were telling him to arrest Charley Abbott for John Everette's murder."

The priest was aware of Madigan's startled exclamation and the sound of something splintering. Herbie stood staring down at his hands which had convulsively gripped the lamb he'd been holding and broken it beyond repair.

"I know that you were notified that this building is going to be torn down, Herbie," Father said, "and I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

know these four walls are your whole life. But were you so bitter that you were driven to commit murder to get revenge?"

"I didn't want revenge," Herbie burst out passionately. "I just wanted to keep my store. That's all!" He wrung his hands despairingly. "I pleaded with Everett for two months, but he wouldn't listen. Said he wanted this land for a parking lot." Morris' shoulders sagged and he began to weep.

Madigan moved to the man's side. "Go on," he said in a hard voice.

"When I went to his house that night, I took the gun just to frighten him. But he still wouldn't change his mind. I went crazy, I guess, and—" He halted and looked pleadingly at the priest. "I didn't really mean to kill him, Father. Honest!"

"What about his wallet?" Madigan prodded him.

"It fell out of his pocket. There was a lot of money in it—almost a thousand dollars. I—I just took it."

"And then hid it along with the gun in the room of a poor innocent man," Father Crumlish said, trying to contain his anger. "And to make sure that Charley would be charged with your crime, you called the police."

"But the police would have come after *me*," Herbie protested, as if to justify his actions. "I read in the papers that they were checking Everett's properties and all his tenants. I was afraid—" The look on Father's face caused Herbie's voice to trail away.

"Not half as afraid as Charley when you kept warning him that the police would accuse him because of his mental record, because he worked in the Liberty Building and was going to lose his job. That's what you did, didn't you?" Father asked in a voice like thunder. "You deliberately put fear into his befuddled mind, told him he'd be put away—"

The priest halted and gazed at the little storekeeper's bald bowed head. There were many more harsh words on the tip of his tongue that he might have said. But, as a priest, he knew that he must forego the saying of them.

Instead he murmured, "God have mercy on you."

Then he turned away and walked out into the night. It had begun to snow again—soft, gentle flakes. They fell on Father Crumlish's cheeks and mingled with a few drops of moisture that were already there.

It was almost midnight before Big Tom Madigan rang St. Brigid's doorbell. Under the circumstances Father wasn't surprised by the policeman's late visit.

"How did you know, Father?" Madigan asked as he sank into a chair.

Wearily Father related the incident at the crib. "After what I heard

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

at the Swansons and what Casey told me, a crying child was on my mind. And then, when I saw what looked like tears on the Infant's face, I got to thinking about all the homeless—" He paused for a long moment.

"Only a few hours before, Herbie had told me how hard it was, particularly at Christmas, to be lonely and without a real home. Charley was suspected of murder because he was going to lose his job. But wasn't it more reasonable to suspect a man who was going to lose his life's work? His whole world?" Father sighed. "I knew Herbie never could have opened another store in a new location. He would have had to pay much higher rent, and he was barely making ends meet where he was."

It was some moments before Father spoke again.

"Tom," he said brightly, sitting upright in his chair. "I happen to know that the kitchen table is loaded down with Christmas cookies."

The policeman chuckled. "And I happen to know that Emma Catt counts every one of 'em. So don't think you can sneak a few."

"Follow me, lad," Father said confidently as he got to his feet. "You're on the list for a dozen for Christmas. Is there any law against my giving you your present now?"

"Not that I know of, Father," Madigan replied, grinning.

"And in the true Christmas spirit, Tom," Father Crumlish's eyes twinkled merrily, "I'm sure you'll want to share and share alike."

Father Crumlish's Christmas Cookies

RECIPE:

3 tablespoons butter
½ cup sugar
½ cup heavy cream
⅓ cup sifted flour
1¼ cup very finely chopped blanched almonds
¾ cup very finely chopped candied fruit and peels
¼ teaspoon ground cloves
¼ teaspoon ground nutmeg
¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon

(1) Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
(2) Combine butter, sugar, and cream in a saucepan and bring to a boil. Remove from the heat.
(3) Stir in other ingredients to form a batter.
(4) Drop batter by spoonfuls onto a greased baking sheet, spacing them about three inches apart.
(5) Bake ten minutes or until cookies begin to brown around the edges. Cool and then remove to a flat surface. If desired, while cookies are still warm, drizzle melted chocolate over tops.

YIELD: About 24 cookies

—Courtesy of the author

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CLASSIFIED

Rates $1.00 per Word

ADDITIONAL INCOME

MAKE Your Classified Ad Pay. Get "How To Write a Classified Ad That Pulls." Includes certificate worth $2.00 towards a classified ad. Send $1.00 to C. D. Wilson, Science & Mechanics, 505 Park Ave., New York, N. Y. 10022.

AUTO PARTS & ACCESSORIES

MAKE hot coffee, cocoa, soup, tea in your own car. Complete details. S. A. Wimberly Co., 119 Willow Street, Dept. D-11, Redwood City, Calif. 94063.

EQMM's Magazine Rack for many interests

CAMPING JOURNAL 75¢—Edited for the camper, fisherman, hunter, boatman, hiker, and others who vacation in the out-of-doors.

INCOME OPPORTUNITIES 75¢—A bi-monthly professionally edited magazine for those persons desirous of going into business for themselves.

MOBILE LIFE 50¢—For present owners and prospective buyers of travel trailers, pick-up campers and mobile homes.

HI-FI BUYERS' GUIDE—$1.00—A new magazine supplying comprehensive, independently conducted test reports on hi-fi components. Features articles on editor-recommended complete systems.

FURNITURE—75¢—Edited for anyone who wants the satisfaction and economy of building, repairing, finishing and maintaining the furnishings of his home.

KITCHEN & BATH—75¢—Idea book for redoing or adding to these two most expensive room in the house, economically and beautifully.

DAVIS PUBLICATIONS EQ-1-68
505 Park Avenue/New York, N. Y./10022

Please send me the latest copy of the magazine(s) I have indicated. I am adding 25¢ to the price indicated to cover postage & handling.

☐ Camping Journal, 75¢ ☐ Mobile LIFE, 50¢
☐ Income Opportunities, 75¢ ☐ Furniture, 75¢
☐ Hi-Fi Buyers' Guide, $1.00
☐ Kitchen & Bath, 75¢

Name .....
(please print)
Address .....
City ..... State ..... Zip .....

BOOKS & PERIODICALS

FREE Illustrated Catalog! Unusual Adult Books! Sondreal, 225 Garnby St., Norfolk, Va. 23510.

CATALOG of all Science & Mechanics Craftprints. Send 25¢ to cover postage and handling to Craftprint Div., Science & Mechanics, 505 Park Ave., New York. 10022.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

I MADE $40,000.00 Year by Mailorder! Helped others make money! Start with $10.00—Free Proof! Torrey, Box 318-T, Ypsilanti, Michigan 48197.

FREE Book "990 Successful Little-Known Business." Fascinating! Work Home! Plymouth 211-R, Brooklyn, N. Y. 11218.

EARTHWORMS

BIG Money Raising Fishworms and Crickets. Free literature. Carter Farm-O, Plains, Georgia 31780.

EMPLOYMENT INFORMATION

"HOW To Get A Better Job". Effective, easy to follow instructions. Full refund if not satisfied. $2.00. Career Aids, Box 415, Dunellen, N. J. 08812

GIFTS THAT PLEASE

FREE Gifts With Order! Send for Color Catalog Now! Jerome Associates, 11 Gothic, SM-1, Novato, Calif. 94947

HOBBIES & COLLECTIONS

NEW! Groovey Psychedelic Color, Poster-of-the-month-club. $3.00 Membership gets two posters Free! Tide Lines, 1632 Milton Road, Napa, Calif. 94558

MONEY MAKING OPPORTUNITIES

YOU are important! Amaze family, friends, five ways to develop profitable leisure time. $4.95. Tide Lines, 1632 Milton Road, Napa, Calif. 94558

PERSONAL

BILL problems? Poor credit no trouble. Not a loan company. Send for free application. Automatic Acceptance, 318DC Broadway Blvd., Reno, Nev. 89502 or 307DC Pocasset Ave., Providence, R. I. 02909.

PROFITABLE OCCUPATIONS

$25.00 AN Hour Possible—Learn Furniture Touch-up. Illustrated Guide $4.98. Pegg Enterprises, Box 243, So. Holland, Ill. 60473

RARE BOOKS

Out of print mysteries? Our specialty. Aardvarks Book Detectives, Box 1749, Orlando, Fla. 32802.

REMAILING SERVICE

ARIZONA Remails 25¢. Monthly $3.00. Jay Brown, 665 Pima, Coolidge, Ariz. 85228.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

Don't be misled by the subtitle of Miriam Allen deFord's THE THEME IS MURDER (Abelard-Schuman, $5), which labels it "an anthology of mysteries." This is not an anthology in the sense in which Queen and I regularly edit anthologies of other people's stories, but a collection of 17 of Miss deFord's own stories (11 from EQMM) over the past quarter century. As you know from her frequent appearances in these pages, deFord is one of the genuine craftsmen of the crime short story. This long-overdue round-up is as notable for clever construction and trickery as for insight into human character and the American scene.

★★★★ **LEMON IN THE BASKET, *by Charlotte Armstrong*** (Coward-McCann, $4.95)

Best book in ages from the mistress of the warm-hearted thriller; delightful blend of character study, international politics, humor and superb suspense setpieces.

★★★★ **A MOST CONTAGIOUS GAME, *by Catherine Aird*** (Crime Club, $3.95)

Skeleton in priest's hole leads retired businessman into the intricacies of historical research to solve an 1815 murder; fresh, absorbing.

★★★★ **BLACK IS THE COLOUR OF MY TRUE-LOVE'S HEART, *by Ellis Peters*** (Morrow, $4.50)

Inspector Felse's investigation of murder at a congress of folksingers has the substance and charm of Golden Age Marsh or Allingham.

★★★★ **WALK INTO YESTERDAY, *by Mildred Davis*** (Crime Club, $3.95)

Familiar gambit of amnesiac heroine who knows too much developed with sensitivity, skill, and some whopping surprises.

★★★★ **RAIN WITH VIOLENCE, *by Dell Shannon*** (Morrow, $4.50)

Homicide, L.A.P.D., handles a number of stupidly pointless killers and a would-be clever one; happy combination of convincing procedure and surprise whodunit.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Even if you are as tired of spy stories as I am, a few recent entries deserve your attention: R. Vernon Beste's REPEAT THE INSTRUCTIONS (Harper & Row, $5.95), in the bleak disillusioned le Carré manner; Charles Early's THE TIGERS ARE HUNGRY (Morrow, $4.50), a swinging Grand Manner melodrama of imposture; Dorothy Gilman's UNCERTAIN VOYAGE (Doubleday, $4.50), highly feminine in its approach; Arthur Arent's GRAVEDIGGER'S FUNERAL (Grossman, $5), quietly persuasive in its observations of modern Germany; and possibly even James Eastwood's outrageous LITTLE DRAGON FROM PEKING (Coward-McCann, $4.50), which comes close to being a Good Bad Book. The paperback edition of Ian Fleming's OCTOPUSSY (Signet P3200, 60¢) betters the hardcover by adding a third short story, and one of Fleming's best.

★★★ **THIRD GIRL, *by Agatha Christie*** (Dodd, Mead, $4.50)

Hercule Poirot returns, challenged by a client who thinks him "too old." Mrs. Christie, of comparable age, is still capable of new tricks to entrap the wily reader (like me, I confess).

★★★ **THE DRESDEN GREEN, *by Nicolas Freeling*** (Harper & Row, $4.95)

Freeling abandons Inspector Van der Valk and detection for a suspense thriller, rich in atmosphere and tragedy, about the problems of finding an internationally coveted 40-carat diamond.

★★★ **WITH OPTION TO DIE, *by Richard Lockridge*** (Lippincott, $3.95)

Merton L. Heimrich, N.Y.S.P., becomes an Inspector, acquires a kitten, solves suburban murder with interracial aspects. Solid, skilled.

★★★ **THE FIFTH CORD, *by D. M. Devine*** (Walker, $3.95)

Fine old-school gambit of patterned series murders, with able deception and good lowland Scots characters.

★★★ **THE VISITOR, *by Anthony Gilbert*** (Random, $4.50)

Possibly not enough of Arthur Crook, but otherwise a strong specimen of the Gilbert specialty: a lone woman's battle against criminals.

Walker is getting around to publishing John Creasey's early Toff novels ($3.95 each), with HERE COMES THE TOFF (1940), THE TOFF GOES TO MARKET (1942) and THE TOFF AND THE GREAT ILLUSION (1944), all new to America. The first is unfortunately up-dated with references to beatniks and The Bomb; the others, left in period, are among the Toff's better cases, especially MARKET, with its vivid glimpses of life (criminous and otherwise) in wartime London.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* Francis Quarles story by

JULIAN SYMONS

first publication in the United States

Francis Quarles, the eminent private inquiry agent, is challenged to solve "a pretty little puzzle" while literally sitting in a Victorian (arm)chair and without leaving it. The puzzle was: Who stole Angela's necklace "with its perfectly graded pearls ranging in size from a pea to a pigeon's egg"?

A PEARL AMONG WOMEN

by JULIAN SYMONS

LORD X (AS HE MUST BE CALLED) was an incredibly old and shriveled little man with the world's largest collection of manuscripts written by criminals. Francis Quarles had spent an absorbing day among these manuscripts in pursuit of some odd theories he had about criminals' calligraphy. Lord X had overlooked these activities with a kind of nodding amusement, and they had now reached the port stage of an excellent dinner in the great gloomy dining room of Mungry Hall.

The two of them sat at one end of the long table which stretched, it seemed endlessly, into the distance. They sat on heavy Victorian mahogany chairs, each with its head carved into the shape of bird or animal—lion, leopard, eagle, vulture, wolf. Behind his head Francis Quarles was uncomfortably aware of the horns of a bellicose mahogany bull. Brownish portraits looked down at them from the dark walls. The whole place, Quarles thought, was decrepit, like its owner.

But was the owner so decrepit? In the immensely creased and wrinkled map of Lord X's face two remarkably bright little eyes seemed to be struggling with an inner joke. He poured some port, and spoke in a rusty, powerful voice.

"You think yourself pretty clever, eh, Quarles? Could you do as much as that Holmes chap and solve a mystery sitting in your chair? Something that happened in this house—years and years ago. Could you do that, eh?"

Copyright 1961 by Julian Symons.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Quarles refilled his own glass. "I could try."

Lids were drawn down for a moment, like a hood, over the bright little eyes. Then the eyes reappeared, staring, it seemed, a long way back into the past.

"All this was in my father's time —old Swordfish as he was called. Remember he used to go in for politics, and the cartoonists called him old Swordfish because his nose was so long and sharp. Good name too, he was as sharp and mean as they made 'em, mean as he was proud. Had a wonderful sense of family and property and all that, believed a man should hang on to his own, hand things on from father to son and so on. He certainly hung on to his own money, kept me confoundedly short I can tell you, until he died and I inherited.

"Well, he was giving a little week-end party, just half a dozen people. The house is so big you hardly knew they were in it. Swordfish was in the Cabinet then, and his Under-Secretary was one of the party—dreary chap named Bateson and his even drearier wife. There was an archeologist called Professor Pirbrick—Swordfish was interested in archeology and sometimes went off for digs when Parliament had recessed—and *his* wife who was half-Egyptian, and rather a piece of goods if you like 'em dark and sultry.

"I ought to say that Pirbrick had never been down here before, and Bateson hadn't been down for some months. Then there was Angela, though that wasn't her name and she was far from an angel, though she was as beautiful as any angel could be. Rumor said she'd had lovers, spent the devil of a lot of money, and that her husband never knew how to pay the next quarter's bills. Still, her little husband, who was nobody in particular, seemed happy enough with her. And that was the party."

Lord X's head sunk forward on his chest in contemplation.

Quarles broke a silence that was somehow curiously intense. "And you were here, of course."

The head jerked up. "Of course. My mother had died long before, as you know, but Swordfish played host on his own with perfect ease. A couple of extra guests came to dinner on this particular evening I'm talking about—a local chap named George Monk who had made a fortune in the South African goldfields and was a passionately keen collector of precious stones, and his niece Eileen. It was their first time in the house too.

"Monk was a bit of a vulgarian, and although he couldn't decently wear more than a couple of rings himself, he saw to it that his niece was pretty well decked out, with bracelets, earrings, and a star thing in her hair. Whatever she may have worn, however, looked pretty shabby by the side of Angela's necklace, with its perfectly graded pearls

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ranging in size from—what shall we say?—a pea to a pigeon's egg. They had the special lustre, Edwardian jewels, that comes from the perfect matching of stones and flesh. Those pearls seemed to be part of her. And this was a fine necklace, an heirloom."

"In Angela's family?" Quarles asked.

Lord X coughed. "Her husband's—but that's neither here nor there. Before dinner Monk, in his rather loud way, admired the necklace, and Angela took it off so that he could look at it. Swordfish, who knew a good deal about such things, looked at it too, although he'd seen it before. Monk went into raptures about the size and lustre of the pearls, gave it back, and we went in to dinner.

"The dining room looked a bit different then, I can tell you. The pictures were the same, and the furniture—as a matter of fact, the chair Angela used at dinner was the one you're sitting in now—but my word, there was a sparkle about it in those days." The lids fell over the old eyes. "There was a sparkle about life altogether in those days.

"At dinner Swordfish was in good form, telling one story after another. He was in the middle of a rather scandalous adventure of his in Buenos Aires, when Mrs. Bateson cried out and stopped him. Angela had dropped to the floor in a faint.

"Of course there was a great hullabaloo. Angela had simply crumpled up, and was half underneath the table. Said it was the heat, and it was certainly a sultry night. She recovered enough to be able to sit at the table for the rest of the meal, although she didn't eat anything. Her necklace had come off when she collapsed, and her husband fastened it on again.

"You might have expected that Angela's collapse would cast a blight on the proceedings, but Swordfish had a passion for party games, and was determined to play them. He'd recently been introduced to the game of murder, and insisted on playing it. We played in the drawing room, with French windows leading out to the lawn, and windows by the side of it that were wide-open.

"The murderer's method was to be the usual one of placing his hands lightly round the neck of his victim. The room was darkened, people prowled about, and then there were *two* screams, within seconds of each other. Mrs. Bateson and Angela were both found on the floor. Both had felt hands round their necks, and both had screamed. Nobody could explain this, until George Monk noticed that Angela's pearls were missing.

"Bateson, we found afterwards, had drawn the card for murderer, and had pretended to murder his wife—or so he said. Somebody else, presumably, had taken the chance to relieve Angela of her necklace."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Lord X stopped and looked at Quarles with his head on one side, like some wise and wicked old bird. "Pretty little puzzle, isn't it?"

Quarles might almost have been asleep, except that his hand moved to the decanter and poured more port. He said nothing.

Lord X cleared his throat, and resumed. "At first they thought that the pearls must have dropped off, as they had before. Then a footman came in, very excited, with a jewel case, and some pearls that had been found outside on a gravel path twenty feet away from the drawing room. But these pearls proved to be merely good imitations that Angela had brought down with her. She had left them in her bedroom, which was just above the drawing room.

"The thief had presumably found them, realized that they were imitations, and thrown them out of the window. Both George Monk and Swordfish himself were prepared to swear that Angela had been wearing the real things at dinner.

"After a couple of hours, very reluctantly, Swordfish called in the local police. They were respectful, naturally, but they didn't use kid gloves. Everybody in the drawing room was searched, and the room itself was turned inside out for secret hiding places and so on, all with no result.

"For months, and even years, afterwards, the police waited for news that the necklace had been offered to some collector—or so I'm told. It never was. The insurance company paid out the very large sum for which the necklace had been insured. Oddly enough, I understand that several years later the whole sum was returned to them anonymously."

There was silence. "And that's all?"

"That's all," Lord X said with a leer, "Now, who stole the necklace?"

Quarles seemed suddenly wide-awake. His large body, instead of being slumped in the chair, was alert. "Nobody."

"What's that?"

"The whole thing was simply a neat fraud on the insurance company."

Lord X gurgled with laughter. "How do you make that out?"

"What other possible motive could an amateur thief have had for stealing a necklace which could be sold for only a fraction of its worth? You could say that George Monk might have been moved to steal it by a collector's passion, but it was his first visit to the house, and the presumed thief must have known the house well enough to know a secret hiding place in it. You weren't quite fair there—you didn't say whether Angela and her husband knew the house well. I assume that they did."

"Yes, you can assume that." Lord X's eyes were bright.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Everything pointed to Angela. She introduced Swordfish to the game of murder, and nobody else knew that they would be likely to play it. And she and her husband had the motive—they wanted money badly. They got it, from the insurance company."

"And how did they do it, I wonder? What was the trick?"

"The simplest in the world, and one of the most effective. Angela came down wearing the real pearls—a fact to which she drew attention by taking them off for examination. When she staged her faint during dinner, she exchanged them for the imitation pearls. During the game of murder she took off the imitation necklace and gave it to her husband, who threw it out into the garden with the case. Perfectly simple."

"But what did she do with the real pearls?"

"She hid them in the dining room when she pretended to faint. Since she sank down by the chair, her range of hiding places was very limited. It was this chair, you said?"

Quarles went down on his knees, and closely examined the thick legs of his bull-headed chair.

Lord X burst out laughing. "You do it by pushing a button under the seat, my dear fellow. A cavity opens in the front right leg. That's right. You'll find it's empty, though—the pearls were taken out long ago. One last question, now. Why didn't Angela and her husband simply sell the pearls, rather than go through this complicated rigmarole?"

Quarles looked thoughtfully at his glass. "Because of Angela's father-in-law."

"Really? How does he come into the story?" Lord X asked with amusement.

"He was mean and proud, had a strong sense of family property, believed things should be handed down from father to son, and so on. He would never have forgotten or forgiven the sale of a family heirloom. The trick was meant to deceive him as much as the insurance company. But I'm glad the money was paid back."

"That's the last of the port," said Lord X. He led the way over to the door and pressed a switch which illuminated one of the portraits. A woman, fair and beautiful, with glowing silky skin, a sensual mouth, and eyes that gleamed with reckless, malicious laughter, stared at them from the frame.

"There she is," said Lord X heavily. "She led me the devil of a life until the day she died fifteen years ago, but I worshipped her, Quarles, I worshipped her. You might say, if you had a turn for that kind of phrase, that she was a pearl among women."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A "change of pace" story—something different, something unusual . . . and perhaps the best way we can introduce this story is to introduce the author, by quoting from her letter:

"I am a 37-year-old housewife, which I find very satisfying although I will admit to a twinge of guilt when I read articles about how I should be yearning to bestow the benefits of my education on the business world (from which I retired 7½ years ago when our daughter was born). My husband is an Assistant Professor of Government at California State College in Los Angeles.

"Besides my husband, daughter, and writing, my great loves are my cats (2), books, my old home-town of Mink Creek, Idaho, and New York City with which I fell madly, irrevocably, and eternally in love during the nine years we lived there while my husband did his graduate work at NYU . . .

"I have been writing since my early teens but did not sell anything until 1962. Since 1963 each year I have doubled the number of sales made the preceding year, and I figure if I can keep this up that during the year 1985 I should sell 2,097,152 stories!

"'A Feline Felony' is my first crime tale. I have attempted more serious suspense stories, but my typewriter, which I firmly believe possesses a personality all its own (slightly pixilated, I'm afraid), refused to go along with me . . ."

We certainly hope to hear more from Mrs. Littke!

A FELINE FELONY

by LAEL J. LITTKE

JEROME KOTTER LOOKED LIKE A CAT. However, this did not bring him any undue attention from his schoolmates since almost all of them had an unusual quality or two. Beverly Baumgartner had a laugh like a horse. Bart Hansen was as rotund as an elephant. Carla Seaver's long neck resembled that of a giraffe. And Randy Ramsbottom always smelled remarkably like a dog on a rainy day.

The only person who worried about Jerome's unusual appearance was his father who quietly set about arming his son to face a world in which he was a bit different. He taught Jerome gentle manners, as-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

suring him that no matter how different he looked he would always get along fine if he acted right. He taught him to recite all the verses of *The Star-Spangled Banner* by heart. He encouraged him to read the Bible. And he taught him to sing the songs from the best-known Gilbert and Sullivan operettas. He felt Jerome was well equipped to face the world.

When Jerome got to high school he became the greatest track star that Quigley High had ever produced although he had to be careful because the coaches from rival schools cried foul when Jerome resorted to running on all fours.

Altogether, Jerome's school years would have been quite happy—if it hadn't been for Benny Rhoades.

Whereas Jerome was tall, polite, studious, and well-groomed with silken fur and sparkling whiskers, Benny was wizened, unkempt, rude, and sly. His face was pinched and pointed and his hair stuck up in uneven wisps. He hated anyone who excelled him in anything. Almost everybody excelled him in everything, and since Jerome surpassed him in the one thing he did do fairly well—running—he hated Jerome most of all. When Jerome took away his title of champion runner of Quigley High, Benny vowed he would get even if it took him the rest of his life.

One of Benny's favorite harassments was to tread on Jerome's tail in study hall, causing him to yeowl and thereby incurring the wrath of the monitor. Benny tweaked Jerome's whiskers and poured honey in his fur. He did everything he could think of to make Jerome's life miserable.

When it came to Benny Rhoades, Jerome found it hard to follow the admonitions of his father—that he should love his enemies and do good even to those who used him spitefully. He looked forward to the day when he would finish school and get away, for he had to admit in his heart that he loathed the odious Benny. It rancored him to think that Benny was the only person who could make him lose his composure and caterwaul in public, thus making people notice that despite his suave manner and intellectual conversation he was a bit different. To keep his temper he took to declaiming *The Star-Spangled Banner* or passages from the Bible. Once he got all the way through the "begats" in Genesis before he took hold of himself and regained his composure.

Just before Jerome was graduated from college, Benny stole all the fish from Old Man Walker's little fish cart and deposited them in Jerome's car, after which he made an anonymous phone call to the police. The police, who had always regarded Jerome as the embodiment of what they would like all young men to be, preferred to believe his claim of innocence; but then again, looking as he did, it was natural for them to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

believe that he might have swiped a mess of fish.

People began to whisper about Jerome when he passed on the street. They pointed out that although his manners were perfect, he did have those long sword-like claws, and they certainly wouldn't want to be caught alone with him in an alley on a dark night. And wasn't there a rather feline craftiness in his slanted eyes?

Jerome left town after graduation enveloped in an aura of suspicion and an aroma of rotting fish which he never could dispel completely from his car.

Jerome decided to pursue a career as a writer of advertising copy in New York, reasoning that what with all the strange creatures roaming about in that city no one was apt to notice anything a bit different about him. He was hired at the first place he applied, Bobble, Babble, and Armbruster, Inc., on Madison Avenue. Mr. Armbruster had been out celebrating his fourteenth wedding anniversary the night before and had imbibed himself into near-oblivion trying to forget what devastation those fourteen years had wrought. When Jerome walked into his office he naturally figured him to be related to the ten-foot polka-dot cobra that had pursued him the night before and thought he would fade with the hangover. After ducking behind his desk for a little hair-of-the-dog he hired Jerome. By the time Mr. Armbruster had fully recovered from his celebration, Jerome had proved himself capable at his job and affable with the other employees, so he was allowed to stay. Mr. Armbruster naturally put him on the cat food account.

Before long Jerome fell in love with his secretary, Marie, a shapely blonde who thought Jerome's sleek fur and golden eyes sexy. He wanted to ask her for a date, but first, in all fairness, he thought he should find out how she felt about him.

"Marie," he said one day as he finished the day's dictation, "do you like me as a boss?"

"Oh, yes," breathed Marie. "Gee, Mr. Kotter, you're the swellest boss I ever had. You're so different."

Jerome's heart sank. "Different? In what way, Marie?"

"Well," said Marie, "Mr. Leach, my old boss, used to pinch me sometimes. And he used to sneak up behind me and kiss me." She peered coyly at Jerome from under her lashes. "You're a perfect gentleman, Mr. Kotter. You're real different."

Jerome was enchanted and wasted no further time asking her out to dinner.

For several weeks everything was wonderful. Then, unexpectedly, Benny Rhoades turned up. Jerome looked up from his desk one day to see his nemesis standing in the doorway.

"Man," said Benny, "if it ain't Jerome Kotter." He grinned.

"Benny Rhoades," exclaimed Je-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rome. "What are you doing here?"

"Man, you're the most," said Benny softly. "I work in the mail room, man. You're gonna see a lot of me, Jerome."

Jerome's tail twitched.

"Why did you come here?" he asked. "Why don't you leave me alone?"

Offended innocence replaced the calculating look on Benny's pasty face.

"Why, man, I ain't done a thing. A man's got to work. And I work here." He lounged against the door jamb. "I hear you're a real swingin' cat around here. I wonder how long that's gonna last."

"Get out," said Jerome.

"Sure, Mr. Kotter, sir. Sure. Think I'll drop by your secretary's desk. Quite a dish, that Marie."

"You stay away from her." Jerome could feel the fur around his neck rising. His whiskers bristled.

Benny smiled and glided away like an insidious snake.

From that time on Benny did what he could to torment Jerome. He held up his mail until important clients called the bosses to complain about lack of action on their accounts. He slammed Jerome's tail in doors, usually when some VIP was visiting the office. Worst of all, he vexed Marie by hanging around her desk asking for dates and sometimes sneaking up to nibble at her neck. Marie hated him almost as much as Jerome did.

Jerome didn't know quite what he could do about it without jeopardizing his job, of which he had become very fond. The other people at the agency liked him, although they regarded him as a trifle eccentric since he always insisted on sampling the cat food he wrote about. But then everyone to his own tastes, they said.

Things came to a head one evening when Jerome invited Marie to his apartment for a fish dinner before going out to a show. They were just sitting down to eat when the doorbell rang.

It was Benny.

"Cozy," he murmured, surveying the scene. He slammed the door shut behind him.

"A real swingin' cat," he said, sidling into the room. He produced a small pistol from his pocket.

"Are you out of your mind, Benny?" said Jerome. "What do you think you're doing?"

"I lost my job," smiled Benny.

"What's that got to do with me?"

"Marie complained that I bothered her. They fired me." Benny's small eyes glittered. "I'll repay her for the favor, then I'll take care of you, Jerome. I'll fix it so they'll think you shot her for resisting your charms, and then shot yourself. Everybody knows a big cat like you could go berserk anytime."

"You're a rat," said Marie. "You're a miserable, black-hearted little rat."

Jerome stepped protectively in front of her.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Sticks and stones may break my bones but names will never hurt me," chanted Benny gleefully.

Jerome was looking at Benny thoughtfully. "A rat," he said. "That's what he is. A rat. Funny it never occurred to me before." His tail twitched nervously.

Benny didn't like the look on Jerome's face. "Stay away from me, man. I'll shoot."

Before Benny could aim, Jerome leaped across the room with the swift, fluid motion of a tiger. He knocked Benny to the floor and easily took the gun from him.

"A rat," repeated Jerome softly.

Benny looked at Jerome's face so close to his own. "What are you going to do?" he squeaked, his own face pinched and white and his beady eyes terror-stricken. "What are you going to do?"

Jerome ate him.

It took a long time to get the police sergeant to take the matter seriously. Marie had urged Jerome to forget the whole thing, but Jerome felt he must confess.

"You say you ate this guy Benny?" the sergeant asked for the twentieth time.

"I ate him," said Jerome.

"He was a rat," said Marie.

The sergeant shook his head. "We get all kinds," he muttered. "Go home. Sleep it off." He sighed. "Self-defense, you say?"

"Benny was going to shoot both of us," said Marie.

"Where's the body?" asked the sergeant.

Jerome shook his head. "There is no body. I ate him."

"He was a rat," said Marie.

"There's no body," said the sergeant. "We sent a coupla men up to your apartment and there's no body and no sign of anybody getting killed. We even called this Benny's family long distance to find out if they knew where he is, but his old man said as far as they are concerned he died at birth. So go home."

"I ate him," insisted Jerome.

"So you performed a public service. I got six kids to support, buddy. I don't want to spend the next two years on a head-shrinker's couch for trying to make the Chief believe I got a six-foot cat here who ate a guy. Now go home, you two, before I get mad."

Jerome remained standing in front of the desk.

"Look," said the sergeant. "You ate a guy."

"A rat," corrected Marie.

"A rat," said the sergeant. "So how do you feel?"

"Terrible," said Jerome. "I have a most remarkable case of indigestion."

"You ate a rat," said the sergeant. "Now you've got a bellyache. That's your punishment. Remember when you ate green apples as a kid?" He sighed. "Now go home."

As they turned to leave, Jerome heard the sergeant muttering to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

himself about not having had a vacation in four years.

Despite his indigestion, Jerome felt marvelous. "Let the punishment fit the crime," he said with satisfaction. He took Marie's arm in a courtly fashion and sang softly as they walked along. "My object all sublime, I shall achieve in time, to let the punishment fit the crime, the punishment fit the crime . . ."

"Gee, Mr. Kotter," said Marie, gazing up at him in admiration. "You're so different from anyone else I ever went with."

"Different?" asked Jerome. "How, Marie?"

"Gee," said Marie, "I never went out before with anybody who quoted poetry."

NEXT MONTH . . .

NEW suspense NOVELET—

STANLEY ELLIN's
The Last Bottle in the World

10 NEW short stories—including

LAWRENCE TREAT's
B As in Blackmail

CHRISTIANNA BRAND's
The Wicked Ghost

ROBERT L. FISH's
Disappearance of Whistler's Mother

EDWARD D. HOCH's
The Spy Who Clutched a Playing Card

Honor Roll reprints by

DOROTHY L. SAYERS
WILLIAM MacHARG

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a *NEW* Mom *SHORT NOVEL* by JAMES YAFFE

One of these days, just as sure as death and 'tectives, a book of Mom stories will be published; and when it appears, the keystone story in it will be this brand-new short novel—the first Mom adventure-in-deduction longer than a short story.

"Mom Remembers" will be the keystone story in the series because in it Mom reminisces and goes back to her own mentor in detection—her own mother—and tells about the first murder she "ever ran up against." That murder occurred when Mom was only eighteen years old—forty-five years ago—and it desperately involved her husband-to-be on the day before Mom's and Mendel's wedding.

But don't think that this short novel is just an old memory: that forty-five-year-old murder has a most contemporary significance—it holds the fate of a teen-age boy accused of murder today.

Mom is a wise, and often a witty, woman. Her wit and wisdom had their marvelous beginnings in the events related in this brilliantly plotted short novel—reader, be on your guard, for Mr. Yaffe is truly a 'tec technician; and no less important, "Mom Remembers" is also a warmly human document of the heart. Read and enjoy!

MOM REMEMBERS

by JAMES YAFFE

"ONE THING I'VE ALWAYS WANTED to ask you," said Inspector Milner to my mother. "How did you ever get interested in crime detection in the first place?"

Mom laughed and said, "From Mama, naturally. She taught me all I know."

This was a surprise to me. Mom never talked much about her parents or her childhood days. Nothing on earth is more boring, she used to say, than "an old lady looking backwards." So I put down my knife and fork and said, "Your mother had a talent for solving crimes, Mom?"

"A talent, he says! Did Einstein have a talent for adding up numbers? Does Van Kleinberg have a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

talent for playing the piano? All right, Mama never went to a college maybe, but as a detective she was a regular PH and D! If you're interested, I'll tell you about the first murder I ever ran up against. It was Mama who solved it—I only stood by and watched and learned—"

But before I go ahead, I'd better explain what led up to these reminiscences from Mom.

It was the fourth of May, a Wednesday night. Ordinarily Shirley and I go up to the Bronx to have dinner with Mom on Friday nights—but the fourth of May is a special date in Mom's life. It's the anniversary of her wedding to Papa. Shirley and I don't like her to be alone for that.

Forty-five years ago Mom and Papa were married. She was eighteen, and he was just twenty-one. Since childhood they had gone to school together and lived in the same tenement building on the lower East Side; their families had come originally from the same little village in the old country. For a long time their parents had agreed—because that was how things were done in the old country—that the children would get married some day. It was no part of the arrangement that they had to be in love with each other—but strangely enough, they were in love with each other.

For over thirty years they lived together happily. They left the lower East Side and moved to the Bronx. They brought me, their only child, into the world. They saved the money to send me to medical school. (I dashed their hopes by deciding, after I got out of college, to become a policeman.) Shortly afterward, while he was in his early fifties, my father died suddenly, his heart weakened by too many bills and too much nightwork and an inexhaustible capacity for worrying about other people's troubles. I'll never forget the look in Mom's eyes—though she struggled hard to keep me from noticing it. Even today, on the anniversary of their wedding, the shadow of that old pain flickers across her face.

Last May fourth Shirley and I brought Inspector Milner up to the Bronx with us. Inspector Milner is my boss at the Homicide Squad. He's a small man with a bald head and bulldog features. His scowl can strike terror into the hearts of murderers, but sitting across the table from an unattached middle-aged lady with a coy look on her face, he becomes as shy and tongue-tied as an adolescent boy. Yet Inspector Milner is a widower with two grown daughters.

Anyway, Shirley and I have been trying for a few years now to get something going between Mom and him, and though there haven't been any serious developments yet, Mom always seems glad to see him. We thought it might cheer her up to see him on May fourth.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Sure enough she gave him a big hug in the foyer. "It's a pleasure to welcome you! Tonight is pot roast, your favorite! If you don't make a glutton of yourself, I'll be insulted!"

A good beginning, I thought. Maybe Mom could get through the whole evening without any flickers of that old pain.

A little later, while we were eating her soup at the dining-room table, she said, "You like my matzoh balls, Inspector? It was the same with my Mendel. He used to tell me he could eat a hundred of them, and even the heartburn was worth it." Her voice began to shake a little. "Such a big appetite he had, for such a little sensitive-looking man—"

This was dangerous ground. Shirley and I spoke up at exactly the same moment.

"I saw a lovely coat at Macy's, Mother," Shirley said. "It was *you* all over."

"A new murder case broke this week, Mom," I said. "Inspector, why don't you tell her about it?"

"Coats can wait, darling," Mom said to Shirley, and then turned to Inspector Milner. "I'd be happy to hear about your new murder case, if you wouldn't mind taking the trouble."

The familiar glint of eagerness was in her eye. For a while, anyway, she would forget to be sad.

"I don't know why David bothered to mention it," the Inspector said. "It's a perfectly routine case. Nothing in it that could interest *you*."

"Mom's interested in *all* our cases," I put in quickly.

"Well then—" Inspector Milner scratched his ear, a nervous habit whenever he had to make a speech in public. "—this eighteen-year-old kid, his name is Rafael Ortiz, mugged and knifed a cab driver last night. It's the usual story. The kid's been hanging around with a bad crowd lately, staying out late at night, fighting with his parents. Sure enough he's finally got himself into serious trouble. Same damn things happening every day, all over the city—getting worse every year—"

"You're positive this boy is the guilty party?"

"Open-and-shut case. The man he knifed came to in the hospital and identified the kid just before he died. And there was an eyewitness too—a completely reliable witness. So you see, any ordinary cop could crack this case. It's a waste of your talents."

Mom blushed. I don't know anybody besides Inspector Milner who can make her blush. Shirley says it's a very hopeful sign.

So the conversation moved on to other things, and a little later—right after Mom served the pot roast—Inspector Milner asked his question about how Mom ever got interested in crime detection. And she gave her answer—and we were back on dangerous ground again.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I'll tell you about the first murder I ever ran up against," she said. "As I said, it was Mama who solved it. It was your Papa, Davie, who got Mama and me mixed up in it. My poor Mendel—"

That shake was in Mom's voice again. But I couldn't figure out how to break in and change the subject.

"When I tell you that Mama was a regular genius at solving crimes," Mom went on, "I don't mean she ever solved an actual murder—until the one that happened the day before our wedding. On the lower East Side in those days people didn't murder other people so much. In her imagination maybe, Mrs. Horowitz would *wish* that Mrs. Shapiro should drop dead, because Mrs. Shapiro is always bragging about her rich relatives uptown and acting like she's better than other people. But the minute after Mrs. Horowitz has such a terrible thought, she feels ashamed of herself, she begs God's pardon in *schul* and she makes some chicken soup for the little Shapiro girl who's got the grippe.

"The point I'm making is, Mama didn't have any sons in the Homicide Squad, or any sons at all—and if she *had*, they would've become doctors or lawyers or gone in for some other *normal* type of work. So the only crimes Mama got a chance to solve were the kind that don't get reported to the police or get written up in the newspapers.

"I'll give you a for instance. Mrs. Kinski from the third floor sells her husband's old Hebrew books while he's uptown working in the hat factory. She puts the money in a sugar can in her kitchen, and the next day it's gone. Nobody's been in that kitchen except the janitor's son to fix the water faucet—which is hopeless, because it's such an old faucet, what's left of it to fix? So everybody in the building is talking how the janitor has a son who's a thief.

"Then Mama steps in and asks a few questions and digs up a few pieces information and remembers something that happened when she was a girl in the *shtetl* in Russia—and out comes the truth! Poor Mr. Kinski stole the money himself, so he could buy back his Hebrew books, which he loved more than anything on earth, including his wife.

"And another time—the little Glogauer girl, age nine, faints in school, and the doctor says it's from hunger, even though her mother gives her a dime every day to buy a sandwich and an apple and a milk. The girl won't tell anybody what she's been doing with the money, and she cries if her mother asks her any questions.

"So Mama does a little poking here and a little poking there, and before the end of the week she uncovers a regular organized Chicago-gangster protection racket which is collecting dimes from all the little kids in the school—and who's run-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ning it? A half dozen eleven-year-old Al Caponies!

"This is the kind of crime that Mama was solving since I was a little baby, since as long as I could remember. The mind she had on her! If her opportunities had been better—if she could've been born in the lap from luxury and had a college education—if only she wasn't a widow with four daughters to bring up and living in a slum tenement and nothing but *tsouris* from the landlord! That wonderful mind, wasted on Delancey Street—to think of it sometimes, it makes me almost cry!"

Mom trembled a little. Then she gave a shrug. "On the other hand, if life wasn't hard for Mama, maybe she never would have developed her wonderful mind in the first place. She *had* to be smart, and think faster and see more than other people—because how else, with no rich relatives, do you keep four daughters from starving and turning into old maids? When it's a matter of life and death to read the butcher's mind, believe me you learn how to be a mindreader!

"So anyway, all the time I was growing up from a little girl I am watching Mama and listening to her when she put that mind of hers to work. And also, you should know, I wasn't such a dope myself—so pretty soon, from picking up a few of her tricks, I got the idea I could do what *she* could do, I could be just as smart as *she* was.

"All right, I wouldn't try to hide it from you—I got a swell head. And what excuse did I have? Only the excuse that I was eighteen years old. It's a bad disease, but thank God everybody grows out of it—except my sister Jennie who stayed eighteen till the day she died at age sixty-three.

"Excuse me, I'll get back to that murder case forty-five years ago, when I finally got the swell head knocked out of me and found out once for all that I couldn't be another Mama if I worked at it till I was a hundred."

Mom stopped, a little out of breath. When she went on talking, her voice was much softer. "Forty-five years ago—the day before my wedding. When I think what a close call it was—if it wasn't for Mama and her brains, would my wedding ever have happened? Would I be sitting here in the Bronx today? Davie, would *you* be sitting here today? And the thirty-two years I had with my Mendel—those thirty-two happy years—"

A mist was coming over Mom's eyes—exactly what I had been afraid of. On May fourth you don't encourage Mom to reminisce. On May fourth you keep her as far away as possible from her memories.

So I broke in loudly. "Old murders don't interest me, Mom. It's *new* murders I care about. That's what the city pays me for after all. This Ortiz kid, the one who knifed the cab driver—I'm not sure it *is* an

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

open-and-shut case, so I'd like to hear your opinion. Why don't you fill Mom in on the details, Inspector!"

"But the story about her wedding day—"

"You'll save it till later, won't you, Mom? We need your expert advice right now—we have to take advantage of this opportunity. Otherwise we wouldn't be doing our duty to the taxpayer."

I knew this strategy would work. The Taxpayer is a concept that always has a powerful effect on Inspector Milner's conscience.

He fidgeted a little and said, "Well—since David seems to think it's important—" He turned to Mom. "I'll tell you more about the Ortiz case. If it wouldn't bore you, that is."

Mom swallowed a piece of pot roast and leaned forward politely. "When did it ever bore me?" she said.

"This Ortiz kid lives on the West Side, in the Eighties," Inspector Milner began. "His parents came from Puerto Rico ten years ago, when Rafael was seven and his sister Inez was eight. Since then there have been two more kids, two little boys. The whole family lives in three rooms in a rundown old firetrap off Amsterdam Avenue. Except the older sister, Inez Ortiz—she moved into a hotel room downtown a year ago, because she and her father used to fight all the time."

"He's an easy man to fight with, Mr. Ortiz?" Mom said.

"He's an insignificant-looking little man. In his forties, but you'd think he was ten years older. He talks in a soft mumbling sort of voice, but all the neighbors say he's got a violent temper, particularly on Saturday nights when he does his drinking. He works in a shipping room down in the garment district, and the mother goes out five days a week as a cleaning woman, leaving her kids with the janitor's wife. In other words, it's no wonder that a kid growing up in a home like that gets himself into trouble."

"Plenty of them manage to stay out of trouble," Shirley said. "The emphasis in psychology today is far less on environmental factors and far more on old-fashioned willpower and individual effort—"

I could see Mom's nose twitching with annoyance. But she never let herself fight with Shirley when she had a guest at her table. So she smiled at Inspector Milner and said, "You mentioned, I think, that it's only recently the boy started getting in trouble?"

"It began six months ago, when he got out of high school. Up till then he was a pretty decent kid, got good marks, held a job in the afternoons as a grocery delivery boy. His parents tell us he was never in a jam, and his teachers and the neighbors confirm that. Also there's no record on him down at Juvenile Court. He lives in a pretty tough

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

neighborhood—there's a gang on the next block that we've been watching—but as far as we can tell, Rafael never had anything to do with them."

"So what changed him?"

"What changes every one of them? They lose hope, that's what. Sooner or later they get the message—high school, hard work, staying inside the law, where's it going to get them? The odds are a thousand to one they'll end up in a shipping room in the garment center, or washing dishes in a restaurant, or sorting mail for some city departments. They get the message, and it caves them in.

"Some of them turn into robots, like Rafael's father—nice quiet obedient machines all day long, then they take it out on their wives and kids at night. Some of them turn into vegetables—they float along on welfare, never hold a job more than a few months, drink too much, and blot out all thoughts of tomorrow. And some of them—the tough ones—try to hit back. Only how much damage can one Puerto Rican boy do to a System? Generally he lands himself in jail—or in the morgue.

"That's the direction Rafael's been taking since last winter. First he complained his job at the grocery store wasn't good enough for him—he had a right to be more than a delivery boy. So he quit and tried looking for something better—and it took him a month to realize he was hitting his head against a stone wall. He couldn't go back to the grocery store, though, or to anything like it—so he started hanging around the apartment.

"His father kept yelling at him and called him a bum—he yelled back and called his father a failure—his mother cried. So he stopped hanging around the apartment. Pretty soon he was showing up only for meals and staying out every night till after midnight, and when his father asked him where he'd been, he told the old man it was none of his business."

"He was spending his nights," Mom said, "with that gang you mentioned?"

"That's what his father thought. But the gang swears they had nothing to do with Rafael, and we can't find anybody who ever saw him with them. Whoever he's been hanging around with, it's somebody out of the neighborhood. Which makes it even worse."

"Could it be a girl maybe? Boys eighteen occasionally take an interest in the opposite sex."

"He has a girl all right. Her name is Rosa Melendez, and she lives half a block away from the Ortizes. Rafael is with her every Saturday and Sunday night, but on weekday nights she never sees him. She's asked him plenty of times where he goes, but all he ever tells her is that he's working on some kind of a 'big deal' and as soon as he pulls it off they'll have enough

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

money to get married. Whenever she pushes him for more details, he gets mad at her and tells her that no man wants to marry a nagging woman."

"It sounds to me as if he's got another girl somewhere," Shirley said, "and he doesn't want Rosa to know about her."

"It's possible," the Inspector said. "But for what it's worth, Rosa doesn't think so. She's been worried sick about him, she admits she's suspected all sorts of awful things—but not once, she says, has she thought he was two-timing her. And I believe her. Besides, the 'mystery girl' theory doesn't fit with a certain crazy story the boy's father told us."

"What story?" Mom said.

"About a week ago the boy's mother got sick—a bad case of this virus that's going around—and she had to stay in bed for a couple of days. Well, in the middle of the afternoon her TV set went on the blink—"

"These people are poverty-stricken," Shirley said, "but they can still afford to have a television set?"

"If you're poverty-stricken," Mom said, "you can't afford *not* to have television. How else can you forget for a while that you're poverty-stricken?"

"Anyway, Rafael fooled around in the back of the set with a screwdriver," the Inspector said, "and managed to get it working again. That night he went out after dinner the same as usual—after the usual fight with his father because he wouldn't say where he was going—and around ten o'clock he called up from outside to find out if the TV was still working.

"He talked to his father, who asked him where he was calling from. This started another argument—but while it was going on, Ortiz heard voices in the background, from his son's end of the line. They were very low at first, and Ortiz couldn't make out what they were saying. Then one of the voices, a man's voice, got louder, and kind of angry. Ortiz heard very clearly what he said: 'Who's scared of the dicks? If any copper gets in my way, I'll mow him down!' A moment later Rafael hung up the phone."

"And his father told you all this?" Shirley said. "Voluntarily—knowing how incriminating it was?"

"I'm afraid he did. Old Ortiz is very bitter about the boy. 'He killed a man, let him take his punishment.' The mother, of course, is just the opposite. She won't hear a word said against the boy. 'My Rafael wouldn't hurt anybody,' she keeps saying. And for her sake—I admit it—I wish our case wasn't so strong . . ."

The Inspector's voice trailed off mournfully. After a moment Mom said, "What about Mrs. Ortiz's television set? Was it working all right when the boy called up?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Good heavens, Mother," Shirley said, "what on earth does that matter?"

"Still I'd like to know."

"The TV was working fine," Inspector Milner said. "The boy's always had a knack for mechanical things. It's a shame he'll never be able to do anything with it now."

"Now?" Mom said.

The Inspector's face tightened. "Two nights ago he threw away his whole life. Around eleven a cab driver named Dominic Palazzo—a little fellow in his sixties, five times a grandfather—let off a fare at Broadway and Eighty-sixth Street, then started east. At Amsterdam Avenue he was hailed by a kid—short, thin, dark hair which was almost as long as a girl's—that was Palazzo's description. Sounds like most of these crazy kids nowadays, I admit it. The kid got in the cab and told Palazzo to take him downtown—and spoke with a Spanish accent.

"Well, after a couple of blocks, when they came to a dark empty stretch, the kid pulled a knife, held it against Palazzo's neck, and ordered him to stop the cab and hand over his cash. It seems Palazzo had been hit by robbers twice in the last year and he couldn't afford to take another loss. So he slammed down on the brakes, hoping to knock the kid off balance and grab his knife away from him. But before Palazzo could even turn his head, the kid stabbed that knife into the back of his neck. Then he jumped out of the cab, ran down the street, and disappeared around the corner. Palazzo was bleeding badly, but he didn't die till two hours later, in the hospital. He had time to make a positive identification."

"You brought the Ortiz boy to the hospital?" Mom said.

"Not the boy himself. We went to his home to pick him up—but he'd left after dinner as usual, and he wasn't back yet. We got a clear photograph of him from his mother—his high school graduation picture—and Palazzo took one look at it and said, 'That's him!'"

"Something is puzzling me a little," Mom said. "How come you went to the boy's home to pick him up such a short time after the stabbing? What made you suspect him?"

"There was an eyewitness. He came out of an all-night hamburger joint on the far corner just after Palazzo started yelling. He saw the boy running down the street and recognized him."

"In the dark, from a block away, with the boy's back turned?"

"It's true this witness didn't actually see the boy's face. But he recognized the general build and coloring—and especially what the boy was wearing. A few months ago the boy bought a leather jacket—bright red, with a black dragon's-head on the back—and a black leather motorcycle cap, and he's been wearing this crazy outfit as

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

often as possible ever since. His father told him he looked like a hoodlum in it—so naturally that encouraged him to keep on wearing it.

"Anyway, his parents and some of the neighbors say that he had this jacket and this cap on when he left his home after dinner on the night of the murder—and our witness clearly saw this same jacket and cap on the boy running away from Palazzo's cab. That, plus Palazzo's identification of the photograph, clinched the case as far as we were concerned. We waited in front of the boy's building till twelve thirty, when he came walking down the street, whistling to himself as if he didn't have a care in the world. Sure enough, he was wearing the red jacket and the black cap. So we pulled him in."

"And he confessed to the crime?" Mom said.

"He *still* hasn't confessed. He swears he wasn't anywhere near Amsterdam Avenue and the Eighties all night long. We asked him where he *had* been, and he said he'd been to the movies with his sister Inez. He'd picked her up downtown—she works as a waitress in a Times Square restaurant, and her hotel is a couple of blocks away—and they went to see a Western double bill together.

"We contacted her, and asked her if she'd been to the movies with her brother that night. She said she had. Then we got a little tricky—we asked her to describe the two science-fiction pictures they had seen. She started talking about monsters and spaceships—well, the upshot was, they both admitted the alibi was a phony. But Rafael still won't admit he killed the cab driver—and he still won't tell us where he spent the night, or where he's been spending most of his nights in the last few months. Well, under the circumstances, what are we supposed to think?"

The Inspector spread his hands helplessly. There was no missing the look of misery on his face.

Then, in a gentle voice, Mom said, "But this evidence against the boy—is it really so open-and-shut? The cab driver picked up a boy on a dark street, and two minutes later this boy stabbed him from behind—so how positive could the poor man's identification be?"

"Palazzo had a good eye and a good memory, Mom," I said. "A year ago, when he was robbed the first time, he didn't get any better look at the thief—but he picked him out two weeks later from the lineup."

"Besides," the Inspector said, "our other witness saw the red jacket and the black cap."

"Couldn't more than one boy in New York have a red jacket with a dragon on it? Maybe this Ortiz belongs to a gang, and this jacket and cap are their uniform."

"No gang in Rafael's neighborhood wears such a uniform," the Inspector said. "Or anywhere else in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the city, as far as we can discover. If there *was* such a gang we'd be bound to know about it. That's why these kids wear these crazy outfits in the first place—so they can show them off in public."

Mom frowned. Then she said, "And this witness who claims he saw the boy's jacket running away from the crime? Can you trust him, this witness? Maybe he killed the cab driver himself, and he's trying to put the blame on an innocent party. Maybe it's a framing-up."

"Our witness is above suspicion," Inspector Milner said.

"Excuse me—" Mom gave a little smile, with just a touch of condescension in it "—when you've seen some of the things *I've* seen in my life, you stop believing that any flesh-and-blood human being is above suspicion. The richest member of our synagogue before the War—a man who gave thousands of dollars to charity, a man with white hair and double-breasted suits—but when five hundred dollars were missing from the Building Fund—"

"Mom," I broke in, "even *you* will have to believe this witness." I took a breath and went on, "The fact is, *I'm* the witness."

Not many times in my life have I seen Mom look surprised. This was one of those times. "Davie—you're making a joke?"

"I wish I were. Last week a man in the Ortizes' building beat his wife to death. He confessed right afterwards, but I had to get statements from the other tenants. When I talked to the Ortiz couple, Rafael was in the room all the time. Heckling me, making cracks about cops—nothing I'm not used to, you understand, but the incident helped me to remember the boy. And to remember the jacket he was wearing.

"Two nights ago, around eleven, I finished my questioning and went across the street for a hamburger and a cup of coffee. I heard yells from the street and went out to see what was up—and I saw the boy running away from the cab. I didn't go after him because it looked as if the cab driver needed help right away. Besides, I knew I could always pick up the kid later on. Take my word for it, Mom—I would've recognized that red jacket anywhere."

Mom frowned harder. Finally she said, "So I believe you, Davie. Naturally. What else? Only—something about this case keeps itching at me—"

A gleam of hope lighted up Inspector Milner's face. "The boy didn't do it? If I could tell that to his mother—if you had some proof—"

"Proof I don't have. Only an idea. Not even an idea—a comparison."

"A comparison with what?"

"With what—?" Suddenly that shadow, that flicker of pain, was on Mom's face. "This murder—it's like the first murder case I ever ran up

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

igainst. This Ortiz boy—like Mendel he is. Like my poor Mendel, forty-five years ago—"

My God, we were on dangerous ground again! I didn't know exactly how we had got there, but I certainly intended to get us off. "Forget about that old murder, Mom," I said. "Please keep your mind on *his* murder, will you?"

"What else am I doing?" Mom said. "Don't you follow me, Davie? This murder right now, that murder forty-five years ago—they could almost be the *same* murder. I couldn't solve the new one if I wouldn't think about the old one—"

I saw that I was beaten and had no choice but to give up gracefully. "All right, Mom, if that's how you want it," I said. "Tell us about that old murder."

Mom folded her hands in her lap and smiled around at us all. "Since you're asking me, I'll tell you," she said. "Only don't let the pot roast get cold, please. Eat, Inspector—eat, Shirley darling—you, Davie, I don't have to encourage, you'll eat no matter what. And while you're all eating, I'll talk."

"First I have to tell you about my Mendel," Mom said. "Your Papa, Davie, was a wonderful man. But maybe most people nowadays wouldn't agree with me. The things in him which were wonderful aren't so fashionable no more—and come to think of it, who knows when they ever were? A big business brain he wasn't—a big personality that told jokes and slapped people on the back he wasn't—a face like Rudolph Valentino and a body like Tarzan he didn't have. You only had to give one look at him, and you knew the day would never come when he'd make a million dollars. So phooey with him! Who cares about such a *schlimazl?*

"But this *schlimazl* was kindhearted and considerate, and he never got mad at people and never said insulting things, and the way he bounced you on his knee, Davie, when you were a little baby—the look of happiness on his face! Plenty millionaires, believe me, live for eighty years and never get such a happy look on their faces, not even when they're adding up their bank books. So for all these things I fell in love with this *schlimazl*—which, in the opinion of a lot of people, including my sister Jennie with the empty head, made me a *schlimazl* too.

"At the age fifteen Mendel was brought by his father and mother to America from the old country. His father was a rabbi. Such a fine-looking man, with a long black beard and eyes that caught on fire when he got angry at somebody and a deep voice that could fill a whole synagogue and also a couple of blocks outside! Into the same building he moved as Mama and my sisters and me—two floors above us—and pretty soon he was made the rabbi of our *schul*. And I have to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

admit it—everybody respected and admired Mendel's Papa, but also everybody was a little bit afraid of him. Because nobody was as strict as he was for keeping the old ways, obeying the old laws.

"For instance, maybe one of the women—strictly accidental, you understand—would get a milk dish mixed up with a meat dish, and she wouldn't find out about it till just before dinnertime. So instead of throwing everything out and starting the dinner all over again, maybe she would say a little apology to God and serve the food to her family and forget to mention her mistake. All right, was this such a big sin? Did she do it to save herself trouble?

"No, she did it to keep her loved ones from going hungry. So wouldn't God forgive one little accident when it's a question of a hard-working husband and growing children who need their nourishment? Yes, God would forgive—but not Mendel's Papa! At *schul* on Friday night this poor woman would stay as far away from him as she could. If he once looked her straight in the face with those black fiery eyes, she was positive he could see right through to the terrible secret in her heart.

"Mendel, when he got off the boat in New York City, didn't know one word from English. Yiddish and Hebrew were all he knew. His first year in this country, till he learned the language, wasn't easy for him. And I wouldn't lie to yo his English never *was* exactly fro Harvard College. He could sa what was on his mind, and unde stand what others said, but all h life, till the day he died, he spok with an accent—and his last day o this earth, in the hospital bed, h forgot all the English he had lear ed, and all his words were Hebrev

"Just the same, he went to scho at P.S. 84 till he was seventeen, an then he went to work for Friedma and Son, Men's Underwear. He w a cutter in the shop. Not exactly th type work his father had in min for him—his father wanted him t be a rabbi, a scholar, and follow i the family tradition.

"But first of all, Mendel wasn the scholarly type—his pleasure w from people, not from books. An second of all, America isn't like th old country. Back in the *shtetl* young man that spent all his da studying the Talmud was a her He gave pride to everybody, and he needed food to eat and cloth on his back, who wouldn't be gla to contribute?

"But here in America, o Delancey Street, it was hard enoug finding the food and clothes f your own children—and wh needed scholars anyway? Did th American newspapers ever pri stories about any scholars? Di you ever read where a scholar wo a prize or made a speech or g elected to anything? To be a su cess in America you had to be

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

usinessman or a professional man r a star in the movies. So who was going to make contributions for Mendel to spend his life with his nose in the Talmud?

"His own father couldn't do it—because let's face it, a rabbi on the lower East Side in those days wasn't getting the type salary, with bonuses and a house and complimentary trips to Israel, that these famous important rabbis with vests and no hair on their faces are getting today. So Mendel went to work as a cutter in Friedman and Son's shop, and not even his Papa, no matter how angry he got, could do anything about it.

"Three years he worked in Friedman's shop. He was a good cutter, my Mendel, and also he had bigger ambitions. And all the time I was in love with him, and he was in love with me. So you're asking, what were we waiting for? For two things only—that I should be eighteen years old, and that Mendel should save enough money so he could quit his job, set up a tailor shop on his own. And since he didn't drink or smoke, or strut around in fancy clothes, or go out with no-good women, with Jezebels, that only show an interest in a man if he spends a lot of money on them—since his idea of a happy evening was to come down two floors and play three-handed pinochle with Mama and me—his savings in the bank were growing very nicely, even though Friedman and Son were, God knows, not exactly showering him with riches.

"Finally, when I had my eighteenth birthday, Mendel said that the time was come to look around for a store to rent—and he talked to my Mama, and I talked to his Papa, and the wedding day was set for the fourth of May. Which only goes to show—people can make their plans, but God might have a plan of his own up his sleeve."

Mom stopped for a moment and gave a little shudder. "God's plan was to play on Mendel and me a little joke. Not such a funny joke, in my opinion—but since when are we supposed to appreciate God's sense of humor? The joke went like this—the trouble that suddenly came to my Mendel, and nearly stopped him from having a wedding or anything else in his life, was brought on his head by one of those no-good women, those Jezebels that he never would have anything to do with.

"Jezebel, naturally, wasn't her name. Sadie Katz was her name. All right, it don't sound so glamorous. In the movies you never saw a vamp named Sadie Katz. In the history books you never read how any Sadie Katz was a king's girl friend and changed the fate of a nation. Well, it's like William Shakespeare said in one of those plays that they made into a movie. 'What's in a name? A girl could be called Rosie or any other name, and still she wouldn't smell so

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sweet.' Hundreds of years ago he wrote those words, and he could've been talking about Sadie Katz!

"She worked by Friedman and Son the same as Mendel. She was on the sewing machines, so she wasn't even on the same floor with Mendel. But she liked to walk around the shop a lot, and give a lookover at everybody that happened to be wearing pants. Half the time her sewing machine was turned off, and she was wandering here and there, wiggling her hips and blinking her long eyelashes at anybody who enjoyed such spectacles. And plenty enjoyed, believe me—including Grossfeld the foreman—a man in his forties with five children and a sick wife! But how else, if it wasn't for Grossfeld, did Sadie Katz produce such a small amount of work and still not get fired?

"She was a dark-haired girl—except occasionally when she felt like being a blonde—and originally she was from Lithuania. A Litvak—so what could you expect? No, excuse me, I shouldn't have made such a stupid remark. The Litvaks are the same as anybody else—prejudices I haven't got, believe me. It's only that something comes over me when I think of that Sadie Katz. Even after all these years—

"Anyway, she was working in the shop for six, seven months when finally she met my Mendel. And after that there practically wasn't a day she didn't throw herself at him. She went up behind him while he was cutting and she mussed his hair. She told him how good-looking he was. She left the shop when he did, and brushed against him in the doorway, and walked along the street with him. She dropped hints—they were as big as atom bombs those hints!—that any time he wanted to he could call her up and take her out.

"No, don't interrupt—I can see the question on your faces. Didn't I just get through saying that Mendel was no Rudolph Valentino and no John D. Rockefeller either? So why should this Sadie Jezebel this Delilah Katz, take such an interest in him? For such a girl, what was the attraction of a homely little man that got his fun from playing pinochle with his fiancee and his future mother-in-law?

"The answer is that Mendel had one attraction for Sadie Katz which none of the other men in the shop had—Mendel wouldn't pay any attention to her. To her charms and her beauty—though frankly I could never see that she was so beautiful!—he was positively a blind man. When she mussed his hair, he squirmed—but from embarrassment, not from excitement. When she told him she wanted to go out with him, he thanked her politely—because Mendel could never hurt anybody's feelings—but explained he was engaged to get married, so he didn't go our with any girls except me.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Well, the truth was, Sadie Katz never ran up against anything like this before. She was used to the men hanging out their tongues for her, throwing themselves under her feet, hopping up and down when she told them to hop. That some poor little cutter, some nobody without a penny to his name, should be able to do without her so nicely—this was a blow to her pride. She couldn't sleep peaceful again till she got Mendel to hang out his tongue for her like everybody else.

"Meanwhile, naturally, she didn't give up her social life from aggravation over Mendel. At the rooming house where she lived, the landlady said she went out practically every night of the week with some man or other. Sometimes he'd come and pick her up, and sometimes she'd get all dressed up and go out alone, without telling anybody who she was going to—and at two o'clock in the morning she'd come waltzing in, still alone but singing to herself. And that same morning she'd get to the shop an hour late or even more—only you can take three guesses if that *noodnick* Grossfeld ever bawled her out!

"Well, this is how it went until the night before my wedding. May third, forty-five years ago—when all of a sudden Sadie Katz ended up the way so many Jezebels and Delilahs end up. She got herself murdered."

Mom gave one of her dramatic pauses. Then she looked around the table. "What's the matter?" she asked. "Why isn't anybody eating? the pot roast isn't up to the usual standard?"

We all assured Mom that the pot roast was delicious, and we started eating again. She relaxed, and went on with her story.

"On May third, at six in the evening, there was a party in Mendel's honor. A bachelor party, with jokes and speeches and drinking toasts to say goodbye to Mendel being an unmarried man. Ten or twelve people were at this party—Mendel's closest friends from the shop, and also Grossfeld the foreman, who wasn't such a close friend actually, but how do you tell the foreman you don't want him at your party? Everybody chipped in with a little money to buy Mendel a wedding present—a fountain pen with a gold clip and his initials on it. Right then and there Mendel took it out and wrote with it, and then he cried a little—from pleasure, you understand.

"This party was held on the first floor of the shop, which had Mr. Friedman's private office and the showroom for the out-of-town buyers. Mr. Friedman, from respect and liking for Mendel, let them use the showroom—and he himself made an appearance at the party near the end. He made a speech, calling Mendel a fine human being and a first-class cutter. Just between us, I think Friedman still had hopes he could keep Mendel from quit-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ting his job and opening up a tailor shop—because even in those days, with sweatshops and no unions, a good cutter wasn't so easy to find.

"But excuse me, I don't want to do Friedman any injustice. He was a man with his heart in the right place. Being the Son in Friedman and Son—the old man died years before—he had an idea the employees didn't respect him like they used to respect his father. So to make up for this he wore those expensive suits, he lived uptown on Park Avenue, he played golf, he made long-winded speeches, and sometimes he was a little high-handed in his business methods.

"But deep down underneath, this wasn't the real Friedman. Didn't he give Mendel a whole two days off for his honeymoon? Didn't he tell his wife—she used to be Stella Plotkin from Stanton Street when she worked for him as his secretary, but now she was Stella Friedman with two mink coats—to tell their cook to bake a small-size chocolate cake for Mendel's party? Didn't he provide the champagne himself, at his own expense? Imported French champagne it wasn't—if I remember correctly, it was champagne from Newark, New Jersey—but still it was a nice gesture on Friedman's part.

"How many times afterwards did I wish that this champagne had been nothing but grape juice! If it wasn't for this champagne, Mendel never would have had this trouble. The fact is, he wasn't used to drinking alcohol. A little wine on the Sabbath, this was his limit. And if he took more than one glass, he was dizzy for the rest of the night.

"But at the party, with everybody drinking toasts and wishing him luck, how could he sit there and not drink back at them? So by the time the party was over—and it only lasted an hour—Mendel had five glasses champagne in him, and the world was doing flipflops in front of his eyes, and he was talking a lot louder than usual. Without beating around the bushel, Mendel was drunk.

"He was so drunk that he couldn't walk home all by himself. So Grossfeld the foreman and a couple other fellows had to help him walk along the street. They did a lot of singing and shouting on the way, and Mendel did as much as anybody else. A block or two from home it suddenly came into his head that it wouldn't be such a good idea if his Papa smelled champagne on his breath. I told you already that Mendel's Papa thought the orthodox ways and traditions were more important than anything on earth. And one of the oldest traditions is that a Jewish boy shouldn't get drunk. He shouldn't be a Prohibitionist either, you understand—he can take a *schnapps* or two for relaxation—but he never goes overboard and loses his head and makes a fool of himself. If Mendel's Papa, a rabbi, found out

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that his own son was drunk, what a *megilla* there'd be!

"So Mendel stopped at a candy store and bought a roll of peppermints for a nickel—his idea was to chew the peppermints and take the champagne smell off his breath. But he was in such a condition that he couldn't stick to this idea. He put the peppermints in his pocket, along with the change from his dollar bill, and he forgot all about them.

"Anyhow, Mendel and his friends and Grossfeld reached our building, and Mendel walked up the stoop, and then he turns to say goodbye to his friends. He not only says goodbye, he makes a speech. His voice is so loud and his gestures are so funny that children come running to look at him and people stuck their heads out of windows up and down the block. Mendel waves his arms and shouts at them, 'I'm a happy man! I'm in love, and I'm getting married! Look at the beautiful fountain pen my friends gave me! Also they gave me five glasses champagne!'

"And at this moment, like she was dropped there in a whirlwind, Sadie Katz is suddenly standing next to Mendel. From the shop she followed him, and now she can't resist the temptation—she puts her arms around him, gives him a big kiss on the mouth, and says to him so everybody can hear, 'You're a free man until tomorrow, Mendel. So why don't you drop in tonight and visit me? And she runs off.

"Then Mendel goes upstairs to his apartment—and his Papa is waiting for him at the door. Right away, as soon as he got a look at his Papa's expression, Mendel was sober again. From the window Mendel's Papa had seen what was going on in the street, and now he was angrier than Mendel could ever remember him—and Mendel's Papa was a man who got angry two or three times every day. So for half an hour Mendel's Papa called him terrible names—a drunkard, a worse than that—and then, like a miracle out of the sky, Mendel did something he never did before in his life.

"He answered his Papa back. He argued, he contradicted. He said he wasn't a drunkard, he said his Papa was old-fashioned and narrow-minded, he said he had a right to live his own life. He didn't say these things maybe with the eloquence of a Jeremiah, a Franklin D. Roosevelt, a Rabbi Stephen Wise—but he said them, this is what counts. After twenty-one years where did he get the courage? Maybe it was the champagne. Or maybe, on the day before his wedding, a man stops being afraid of things, because he don't think anything worse could happen to him.

"So the argument got louder and angrier, and finally Mendel's Papa called him a sinner and a transgressor and ordered him into his room. And Mendel said, 'Why should I go into my room? It's early yet, the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

night hasn't even begun—I have to go out and do some more sinning and transgressing!' Then, while his Papa shook a fist at him and his poor Mama moaned and squeezed her hands, Mendel went marching out of the apartment.

"It was eight o'clock at night when he left. It was after midnight when he got back. His Mama heard him closing the front door, then going to the bathroom, then making noises like he was being sick in the sink. Then she heard him going to bed. A little later she sneaked into his room and saw him fast asleep, with his clothes thrown all over the furniture. So she emptied the pockets and hung up his suit, and sneaked out of his room again.

"The next morning the police came and arrested Mendel for strangling Sadie Katz to death, some time between nine thirty and eleven the night before."

Mom gave another one of her pauses. She has a genuis for knowing when to make her listeners wait.

She ate a piece of pot roast, washed it down with a mouthful of water, and went on. "Sadie Katz lived in Mrs. Spiegel's rooming house on Avenue A. It was a five-story building, and if it ever saw better days, they must have been before the American Revolutionary War. Sadie Katz had a room on the second floor, which was just about big enough for a bed and a basin. Mrs. Spiegel lived on the first floor, with Mr. Spiegel, who went out every day and sold old clothes from his pushcart while Mrs. Spiegel took care of the rooming house. They came from Germany five years before, the Spiegels, and looked down their noses at anybody who came from Russia or Poland. They pretended to be cultured and intellectual. Spiegel was always reading German books, and the two of them went three or four times a year to the theater.

"On May third, according to the Spiegels, Sadie Katz got back to the rooming house at seven o'clock—which must have been a few minutes after she made such a spectacle of herself in front of our building. She went up to her room, and they could smell a piece of meat cooking on her hot plate. In Mrs. Spiegel's rooming house there was only one telephone—it was on the wall in the ground-floor hallway, and the roomers had to put a nickel in if they wanted to make a call. Sometimes people from outside would call this phone—which happened at ten minutes after eight on the night of May third. Mrs. Spiegel answered the ring, and a voice—a low whispering kind of voice, like somebody with a cold—asked to speak with Sadie Katz. Mrs. Spiegel yelled upstairs for Sadie, and went back to her apartment where she was giving Spiegel a knockwurst dinner.

"She closed her apartment door, naturally, but not all the way—maybe by accident. The Spiegels could

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hear every word Sadie Katz was saying on the phone. 'What a surprise to hear from *you!*' she said. 'You want to see me tonight? I'm flattered,' she said. 'No, I won't meet you outside. I'm tired, and I want to spend a nice evening at home. So why don't you come over here?'

"There was a long pause, and then Sadie sounded a little angry. 'Why should anybody see you?' she said. 'You'll ring the front doorbell, I'll come down and let you in myself. And what if somebody *does* see you? Am I a social outcast or something? Is it a crime to pay me a visit?' Then she gave a laugh and said, 'What are you afraid of? You're still a free man, aren't you? You can do what you like!'

"And then she said, 'All right, I'll expect you in about an hour.' Then she hung up the phone, knocked on the Spiegels' door, and told them she was expecting a visitor tonight, and she'd appreciate it if they let her open the front door when the bell rang. Then she went upstairs to her room.

"It was nearly nine thirty when the front doorbell rang. Mrs. Spiegel opened her door and started out to the lobby—but Sadie Katz appeared on the stairs at the same time. 'I'll get it, thank you,' she said, and she deliberately waited till Mrs. Spiegel went back into her apartment. A few seconds later the Spiegels heard the front door opening, then they heard Sadie's voice, loud and cheerful, and another voice, very low and muffled—and then they heard two pairs of feet climbing the stairs. But they never even caught a glimpse at Sadie's visitor.

"A little later the Spiegels went to bed, because Spiegel had to get up at the cracking of dawn and go out with his pushcart, if he expected to compete with the other old clothes peddlers from the neighborhood. So they slept all night and woke up at five o'clock. At six o'clock Mrs. Spiegel saw Spiegel out the front, then she went upstairs to give a knock on Sadie's door—she did this every morning, so Sadie would wake up in time for work. Only this morning there was no answer to the knock.

"Mrs. Spiegel tried the door, and it wasn't locked. She went into the room and saw Sadie Katz lying on the floor. Sadie was wearing her fanciest clothes—what she'd been wearing at nine thirty the night before—but her make-up was smeared, her sleeve was torn, and her tongue was sticking out. So Mrs. Spiegel started screaming.

"May fourth this was. The morning of my wedding day. Only before this morning was over it looked like there wouldn't be any wedding.

"The police came to Sadie Katz's room and examined the body, and heard from the Spiegels about the phone call and the visitor. Especially they were interested in one part of that phone conversation—

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

'You're still a free man, aren't you? You can do what you like.'

"Who could Sadie have said these words to, except somebody who pretty soon would *stop* being a free man—in fact, somebody who was on the verge of getting married? So the police went to Delancey Street, got Mendel out of bed, and arrested him."

"The evidence seems pretty flimsy," I said. "We wouldn't arrest a man on evidence like that today."

"Excuse me, I forgot to mention," Mom said. "There was one other piece evidence. On the floor of Sadie's room was a big mess—things that fell there from the struggle with the murderer. Part of this mess was a new fountain pen, with a gold clip, and with Mendel's initials on it."

Inspector Milner sucked in his breath. There was a look of concern on his face—as if he were Papa's closest friend, and the murder had happened only yesterday.

"But it was even worse than that," Mom went on. "The police asked Mendel where he was between eight o'clock, when he left his apartment, and after midnight, when he came home again. Mendel said he didn't know. He got on the subway and stayed on it till he felt like getting off—he didn't even notice what stop. Then he walked along the street for a while, only he couldn't say what street—some people passed by him and laughed at him for having his hat on. Then he sat on a bench in a little park—he couldn't say what park, he couldn't say how long. Finally he got up and went back to the subway—but it turned out he didn't have any money in his pockets—so he walked all the way home.

"Then the police showed him his fountain pen, and he admitted it was his and looked surprised that it wasn't still in his pocket. The police told him they weren't satisfied with his story—who would be?—but Mendel wouldn't change it.

"And then Mendel did something that made his case practically hopeless. 'I'm guilty,' he said. 'I broke the law, I deserve to be punished!' And he went up to his Papa and got down on his knees. 'Forgive me, Papa, I'm a sinner and a transgressor, just like you called me!'

"Naturally the police pounced on this. 'Are you confessing the murder?' they said to him. 'You're admitting you went to the girl's room and tried to make love to her—and when she rejected you, you flew into a rage and killed her?'

"But Mendel just blinked at them and said, 'I didn't kill anybody,' and went on saying how guilty he was. He went on saying it all the way to jail."

Mom broke off with a sad little smile. "An hour later, while I was trying on my wedding dress, they broke the news to me. I started shouting that I had to get to the jail, and see my Mendel and comfort him in his time of trouble.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Mama tried to calm me down. 'Don't be in such a hurry taking off your wedding dress,' she said. 'If you're not careful, you'll tear it.' But she didn't insist very hard on this. Because the same thought was in her head and mine—the chances were that this dress would never be needed."

Through the window we heard a woman yelling. "Herbie, get up here right this minute, or you're in bad trouble! You hear me, Herbie?"

It broke the spell. It pulled us out of the lower East Side of forty-five years ago, with its ramshackle tenements and narrow streets, back to the Grand Concourse and the TV antennas and the faint humming of air conditioners.

"For heaven's sake, Mother," Shirley said, "what *happened?*"

"What happened?" The sadness went out of Mom's smile. Some of the old tartness came back to her voice. "We're all here tonight, aren't we? So that's pretty good proof that the wedding dress was used."

"You cleared your husband of suspicion?" Inspector Milner said. "You solved the murder?"

"How could I be in any condition to solve anything? At eighteen years old, even under ordinary circumstances—even if the man you love *hasn't* been put in jail—you're slightly hysterical. So it wasn't me who did the solving, it was Mama.

"Right away, as soon as I was out of my wedding dress and back in my normal clothes, Mama made me sit quiet on the sofa and gave me a glass seltzer water and took hold of my hand.

"'All right,' she said, 'let's take one minute to talk over this situation. You wouldn't do Mendel any good by running down to the jail and crying over him. All you'll do is get him wet. What's needed now is figuring out some way to prove he's innocent.'

"'Mama, you believe he's innocent?' I said, and if somebody gave me a million dollars I couldn't have been more grateful.

"'Naturally I believe,' Mama said. 'A nice boy like Mendel that wouldn't even cheat in a pinochle game—if he drank all the champagne in New York he couldn't play around with another girl behind your back. And murder? With his kind heart and his weak stomach, he couldn't murder a cockroach in the sink.' Then Mama looked at me very hard. 'And you, baby? You don't believe he's innocent? You love him, and you've got doubts?'

"I swore to Mama that I had no doubts. This was the truth—but let's face it, it was still a relief to find out that Mama agreed with me. All by itself my opinion was strictly from the emotions of a girl in love. With Mama behind it this opinion suddenly had some sense in it—there was even a possibility we could make other people believe it too.

"'So let's go over the facts,' Mama said, rubbing her hands together

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

exactly like she did before she 'went over the facts' about Mrs. Kinski's sugar can. So for the next half hour Mama and I told each other three or four times what the police and the neighbors and Mendel's mother had told us. I concentrated hard on every bit of it, trying to see it with Mama's eyes and think about it with Mama's mind. How many times had I said to myself that I could solve problems just as good as Mama solved them! So here was my chance, with my Mendel's life at stake. Now was the time to prove I wasn't strictly a bag of talk.

"After half an hour I didn't have an idea in my head. But suddenly Mama gave a big smile and nodded her head a couple times. 'Good, good, I'm beginning to get a thought,' she said. *'Now* you can run down to the jail and cry over Mendel, baby. But also don't forget to ask him a certain question I've got in mind. And then you should drop in on Grossfeld, the foreman at the shop, and ask *him* a question. And another question you should ask the Spiegels at the rooming house. And in the meantime I'll go upstairs and give a little sympathy to Mendel's poor Mama and Papa—and while I'm there, I'll ask *them* a question too.'

"Then Mama told me what her questions were—and none of them made any sense to me. But I agreed to ask them anyway—because in those days when a mother told a child to do something, you did it, and you didn't put up any argument.

"Down at the jail they let me talk to Mendel in a long room with a table between us. First I told him I loved him and believed in him. Then I begged him he should tell me the truth where he was between eight o'clock and midnight last night, and if he had any witnesses he should give their names to the police. But Mendel just shook his head and told me he wasn't any murderer but he couldn't say no more than that. And anyway what did it matter, since a no-good like him deserved only the worst?

"So when I saw I couldn't make him act sensible, I changed the subject and asked him Mama's question. 'After your fight with your Papa last night, did you change your clothes before you ran out of the apartment?'

" 'When did I have time to change my clothes?' Mendel said. 'I got home, Papa and I yelled at each other, I ran out. I wore the clothes I was wearing all day long. And why please do you want to know?'

"But how could I tell him why? I didn't *know* why I wanted to know. So I kissed him across the table and told him he shouldn't lose hope, then I went away to ask the rest of Mama's questions. On account of the murder Friedman had closed the shop this morning, so I went to the building where Grossfeld lived. He had four rooms on the top floor—and his wife was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lying in the bed smelling like medicine, and his kids, all five of them, were making enough noise for a hundred.

"It wasn't easy to make my voice shout over the racket. But I finally asked Grossfeld, 'Can you tell me please—before Mendel left the party at the shop yesterday, was he sick maybe from the champagne? Did he go to the Men's Room to be sick?'

"This was another question I couldn't make any sense out of. What did it matter if Mendel was sick or well? If a man commits a murder, they wouldn't let him go because he had an upset stomach at the time. 'As a matter of fact,' Grossfeld answered me, 'Mendel *did* get sick. It came over him just as he was getting ready to leave. He went running to the Men's Room and stayed there ten minutes, and when he came out he was looking a little green in the face.' I thanked Grossfeld, and then I headed for the rooming house where Sadie Katz was killed.

"The police were standing in front of it, and I had to convince them I had important business inside. Finally I got in to the Spiegel apartment, where Mrs. Spiegel was lying on the sofa, still being in a state of shock from finding a dead body, and Mr. Spiegel was fanning her head. But underneath the shock I could see in Mrs. Spiegel's eye a pleased look, from being the center of attention.

"I apologized for disturbing her at such a time—which was enough encouragement for her to tell me the whole story of her terrible experience. But finally I managed to ask Mama's question—which was even crazier than the other two. 'The two of you are lovers of the theater, I understand. Which do you prefer, the American plays or the Yiddish plays?'

"When I asked this, they looked puzzled—not half as puzzled as I was, though! They answered me that they went most of the time to the Yiddish theater. 'The American actors talk so fast,' said Mrs. Spiegel, 'you couldn't follow the story.' 'Or understand the jokes,' said Mr. Spiegel.

"So I thanked them kindly, and went back home and told Mama what answers I had got. And right away she rubbed her hands together and said, 'Good! In fact, perfect! I also asked a question and got an answer. With all the wailing that's going on upstairs it wasn't easy to put a word in edgewise—but finally I took Mendel's Mama aside. I asked her if she wouldn't tell me please—when she emptied out her son's pockets at midnight last night, did she happen to notice how many peppermints were left in the roll? And she answered me that she didn't find any peppermints in his pockets at all. So what do you think of that, baby?'

"I said to her, 'I think I'm going to start crying in two seconds, Ma-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ma. They're accusing my Mendel of killing a woman and you're worrying that he's eating too much candy!'

"But Mama didn't get annoyed or upset at me. A woman who, at the age thirteen, hid in a closet for two hours while a pogrom was going on outside don't get ruffled so easy. 'Baby, baby,' she said, 'use already the brains God gave you. You know all the facts from the murder, you heard the answers to my questions —so now you should be able to prove who is.'

"That's what Mama said to me on May fourth, at eleven o'clock in the morning, forty-five years ago. And that's what I'm saying to you now."

Mom stopped talking and gazed around at all of us. On her face was that look of satisfaction which is always there at a moment like this. She knows perfectly well that we're going to admit our stupidity and beg her for an explanation.

"I don't see it," Inspector Milner said. "The case against Mendel—your husband—looks awfully strong to me."

"The case was strong," Mom said, "as long as Mendel wouldn't come up with an alibi, with a witness who saw him where he was at the time of the murder. What Mama had to do was figure out for herself where Mendel was, so the police could find his witness even without his cooperation—"

"But if there *was* such a witness," Shirley said, "why on earth didn't he say so? Surely an innocent man wouldn't *deliberately* let people think he was a murderer!"

"Wouldn't he?" Mom's voice was very quiet. "Suppose there was something which, in his opinion, was worse than being a murderer."

These words filled the room for a moment. Then the Inspector said, "What could be worse?"

"It's a question of how a person was brought up," Mom said. "What was he taught to care about and have respect for and be frightened of? But I'll show you what I mean step by step, the way Mama showed it to me.

" 'Where did Mendel go between eight o'clock and midnight?' Mama said to me. 'He went some place where people laughed at him for wearing his hat. So what does this mean to you, baby?'

"I answered her, 'It means he went to a neighborhood where there aren't any Jews. A Jewish boy is supposed to wear his hat all the time, cold or hot, inside or outside —it's part of the religion, it shows his respect for God. In a Jewish neighborhood nobody would be surprised at seeing a boy with his hat on.'

" 'This is true,' Mama said, 'but you didn't go far enough. How many times did I tell you?—half an answer is as bad as no answer at all. Even in a neighborhood without any Jews, what's so peculiar about a boy walking along the street with

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a hat on? It's early in May yet, it's not so hot that hats are ridiculous.'

"'You're saying, Mama, that Mendel lied about the people laughing at him?'

"'About that he told the truth. Why make up such a story? But the minute he mentioned those people laughing, he remembered he couldn't tell the *whole* truth about them, because if he did he'd have to explain certain things he didn't want to explain. He wasn't walking on the street when these people laughed at his hat. He was *inside*—he was indoors some place where you're supposed to take off your hat. He didn't take it off, and to the other people this was funny.'

"I was a little annoyed at myself, I admit it, for not figuring this out too. So I pretended I didn't think it was important. 'Indoors or outdoors, what's the difference?' I said. 'Maybe the people laughed at Mendel in the subway. He already told us he rode in the subway last night.'

"'If the laughing happened in the subway,' Mama said, 'why should he lie about it and say it happened on the street? And anyway, what man ever takes off his hat in the subway? So only believe me, baby—Mendel was *inside* some place last night. Now tell me please what *kind* of place?'

"I couldn't tell her. My mind wasn't working. So Mama said, 'Think, baby, think. What about the money in Mendel's pocket?'

"'Wait a second, wait a second,' I said—and my mind was showing signs of life again. 'On the way home from the shop last night Mendel went into a candy store and bought a roll of peppermints.'

"I could see from Mama's excited look that I was on the right track. 'So, so? What about those peppermints, baby?'

"'He paid for them with a dollar bill and put the change in his pocket. Then he got home, had a fight with his Papa, and ran out again without changing his clothes. He took a subway, stayed out for a few hours, then decided it was time to go home. But when he went back to the subway station there wasn't any money in his pockets! What happened to his change from the dollar bill? A nickel for peppermints, a nickel for one subway ride—he should have ninety cents left. Did he get his pocket picked? Foolishness. A boy like Mendel, who isn't exactly the rich-looking type, don't attract pickpockets. He *spent* this ninety cents, Mama! This place where he went indoors, where he wouldn't take off his hat—it was some kind of store where he bought something for ninety cents.'

"'Good, good,' Mama said. 'But what kind of store is it where you're usually expected to take off your hat?'

"I couldn't say a word. All of a sudden my mind had run down again. Mama shook her head and said, 'You made such a good start with the peppermints, baby. Why

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

don't you finish with them already? On the way home from the shop yesterday Mendel bought peppermints. But he didn't eat them, he put them in his pocket and forgot about them. And after midnight, when he was finally asleep in his bed, his Mama went through his pockets and what did she find? No peppermints. Some time in those four hours while he was out, he ate all the peppermints. So why?'

"'He was hungry,' I said. 'Didn't he miss his dinner?'

"'Does a growing young man make a dinner on a roll of peppermints? There's another reason for eating peppermints, no? The reason why he bought them in the first place—'

"'To hide the champagne on his breath from his Papa,' I said. 'But Mama, this was no reason any more —because Mendel's Papa already found out about the drinking.'

"'Naturally—that's the point I'm making,' Mama said. 'He ate those peppermints to cover up something *else* on his breath. Maybe to cover up—'

"I broke in on her because now, as clear as daylight, I saw the truth. 'To cover up something he was *eating!* Isn't that it, Mama? The store he went to in that non-Jewish neighborhood was a *restaurant!* In what other kind of place are you supposed to take off your hat? He was hungry, he went in there, he sat at a table, and ordered something which cost him ninety cents. It must have been something *awful,* Mama —because he swallowed a whole roll of peppermints to cover up the smell of it—and when he got home at midnight, he went straight to the bathroom and got sick!'

"'Very smart thinking,' Mama said, 'but you're sure it wasn't the champagne from the party that made him get sick in the bathroom?'

"'No, it couldn't have been,' I said. 'He already *got* sick from the champagne. Earlier in the evening, just before he left the shop. So at midnight it was something else that made him sick—something he ate at that restaurant—'

"*'Mazel tov!'* Mama said, and she looked prouder of me than I ever saw her look before. 'So tell me, baby, what was this food which gave Mendel such a sickness? What was it that he felt so ashamed of he had to cover it up with peppermints, and it upset him so much it made him sick?'

"'Mama, I don't know!' I said, and to tell you the truth I was practically in tears. 'I don't know what he ate in that restaurant, and even if I did, how is it going to get him out of jail?'

"Mama took me in her arms and patted me on the shoulder. 'Baby, it's so simple,' she said. 'If you wasn't so worried, you'd see how simple it is. A boy like Mendel, a quiet shy boy who don't stick up for himself—last night he finally stuck up for himself, he finally told

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his Papa he was going to live his own life. And naturally, when he ran out of the apartment he was mad—a lot madder than some other boy would be, because Mendel's been saving up this madness for twenty-one years.'

"'I'll show Papa,' he said to himself. 'I'll do something desperate already! He'll see that I'm not under his thumb no more!' Then Mendel got off the subway and walked for a while and saw this restaurant—and decided to do the positively most desperate thing he could think of. He went into the restaurant and ordered—'

"'Pork!" I blurted out, between sobbings and gulpings.

"'What else?' Mama said. 'Pork or ham or bacon—the forbidden food, the food that no orthodox Jewish boy who was brought up like Mendel can eat without giving God a slap in the face. He ate the *trefe* pork, and for maybe five minutes he felt like he just did a brave wonderful thing.'

"'But twenty-one years don't go down the drain in one night. All of a sudden the brave feeling went away, and Mendel was hating himself, he was full of shame, he was expecting any minute that God would bring the thunder and lightning down on his head. And worst of all, he was imagining what his Papa would say if he ever found out. Whatever happened, he couldn't let his Papa find out!'

"'So he ran out of the restaurant and he stuffed his mouth with all the peppermints so there shouldn't be any smell of pork on his breath. Then he went home—and the idea of this forbidden food in his stomach was finally too much for him, so he got sick in the bathroom. And in the morning, when the police came and accused him of killing Sadie Katz, what a terrible pickle he was in! To clear himself he had to tell them what he was doing at the time of the murder—but this is the thing he can't tell anybody. Better the whole world should think he's a murderer than his Papa should find out he ate *trefe* food.'

"When Mama finished I was relieved and happy and mad, all at the same time. 'This is why he keeps saying how guilty he is, Mama? This is why he calls himself a sinner and a transgressor and admits he broke the law? That Mendel—how could he be so crazy?'

"'When you're twenty-one, it's easy,' Mama said. 'So we'll save him from his own craziness, baby. We'll tell our idea to the police, and they'll check up on restaurants, and it won't be long, believe me, that somebody remembers the skinny boy who wouldn't take off his hat.'

"And Mama was right, like always. The police found that restaurant by three o'clock in the afternoon and my Mendel was out of jail by four—and at five o'clock, exactly on schedule, Mendel and I got married. And we lived happy ever after—for thirty-two years."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

We were silent for a moment, and then we all talked at once.

"If your husband didn't kill the girl," Shirley said, "who on earth did?"

"What was Papa's fountain pen doing on the floor of Sadie Katz's room?" I said. "And how do you explain the phone call she got on the night she was killed?"

"And why," Inspector Milner said, "did you tell us that this old case reminds you of the case we're working on now? What's the comparison between your Mendel and the Ortiz boy?"

Mom chose to answer this last question first. "I'll tell you the comparison," she said, "as soon as you answer me two questions." Then she raised a finger. "One. In the last few months, since the Ortiz boy started staying out late at night, is he spending more money than usual—wearing expensive clothes maybe, or buying fancy presents for his girl friend?"

"Evidently not. Neither his sister nor his mother has seen him in any new clothes in the last four months. And his girl, Rosa Melendez, claims he doesn't even take her out to the movies as much as he used to."

"Two," Mom said. "When he was in high school, what classes did he have in learning how to put things together and take them apart?"

"Vocational training, you mean? He never had any. He always refused to take those courses at schoo —maybe because his father was al ways telling him he *should* take them."

Mom gave a nod. "Thank you It's what I expected. Like you saic —it's an open-and-shut case."

Inspector Milner got that look o misery on his face again. "You mean, you can't help the boy? You agree with us that he's guilty?"

"I was sure you'd feel that way Mother," Shirley said. "If ever any body's guilt was perfectly ob vious—"

"Obvious?" Mom shook her head. "Like Mama told me years ago—jumping to conclusions is the best way there is to fall flat on your face. For months this Ortiz boy goes out after dinner at night and don't come back till midnight and wouldn't tell nobody where he's been—so everybody jumps to the conclusion he's doing something crooked."

Inspector Milner said, "What *other* conclusion—"

"These robbings and killings," Mom said, "which he's supposed to be doing every night—he only does them on weekdays. On week-ends, on Saturday and Sunday nights, he goes out with his girl friend like always. This don't seem funny to you? A gang of robbers that takes vacations on week-ends—expecially on Saturday nights, when more people are likely to be drunk and walking late on the streets and carrying a lot of money?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

'And another funny thing—for onths this boy is doing all these oberies, but instead of spending ore money than usual he's spend- g *less*. So what's happening to his ofits? And one answer is coming me—maybe there *aren't* any pro- s, maybe there *isn't* any gang of bbers."

"But Mom," I said, "that voice the y's father heard over the phone nen the boy called up his home a ek ago—"

"This voice—it's the funniest ing of all. You remember what it d, this voice? 'Who's scared of the cks? If any copper gets in my ay, I'll mow him down!' An ex- rt on gangsters I'm not, but oc- sionally I read the newspapers d look at the television and listen the kids in this neighborhood king. Tell me if I'm wrong, but s my opinion a young tough guy wadays wouldn't say something e 'dicks' and 'mow him down' if s life depended on it. The popular ord today is 'fuzz'—no? And if u're going to shoot somebody, aybe you'll 'blast' him or 'cool' m. But 'dicks' and 'mow him own'—this is what they used to say enty-five years ago. In fact, this what they're always saying in ose old movies with Humphrey ogart and Edward G. Robinson." Inspector Milner slapped his nd down on the table. "You en't implying—"

"You're right, I'm implying," om said. "That the voice talked like one of those old movie gang- sters? Why not, if that's what it *was?* And where are they showing nowadays those old movies? On television, am I right? When Mr. Ortiz talked to his son on the phone last week, what he heard in the background was an old movie on the television."

"I don't see what that proves," Shirley said. "The boy and his hoodlum friends happened to be watching TV that night—"

"Look a little harder at that phone call," Mom said. "Like Ma- ma used to tell me—half an answer is as bad as no answer at all. Why did the Ortiz boy make that call? Because he fixed his mother's tele- vision set early in the afternoon and he wanted to find out if it was still working. But who can fix a television set just by fooling around inside it with a screwdriver? Some knowledge and experience it takes. But this boy never had any classes in vocational training at his high school. So I'm asking myself— where did he learn how to fix tele- vision sets? And I'm answering by putting two and two together.

"For months he's been staying out four hours every night—he never goes out like this on Saturday or Sunday nights—he's been spend- ing not more but less money than usual during these months—the place where he goes has a television set playing—and suddenly, out of nowhere, he's got a talent for fixing television sets.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Does this sound to you like a boy who's robbing and killing with a gang?—or does it sound like a boy who's taking a night course in how to be a television repairman, so he can get a good job and marry the girl he loves?"

Looking half encouraged and half worried, Inspector Milner started shaking his head. "But if that's what he's been doing all these months—if that's what he was doing the night of the murder—why didn't he tell us? Why didn't he ever tell his parents?"

A sad little smile was on Mom's face again. "The younger generation," she said. "You think maybe it's changed after forty-five years? A Jewish boy on the East Side, a Puerto Rican boy on the West Side—but still they're two boys, with the same feelings and hurts and foolishness inside of them. For this little Ortiz boy, like for my Mendel, some things are worse than being arrested for murder. For both these boys the most important thing is, Papa shouldn't find out their secret."

"You're being illogical, Mother," Shirley said. "Your fiancé did something that his father would've disapproved of—naturally he didn't want to be found out. But this Ortiz boy, if your theory is correct, has been doing something his father *would* approve of. So why should he try to hide it?"

"You answered your own question. Because his father *would* approve of it. In fact, when he was i high school his father *told* him t do something like this. The bo positively refused—but a fe months ago he decided, all by hin self, that his father was right. H signed up for the night course, he been working at it hard and stead —but how could he admit this t his father, to *such* a father? Ho could he give his father the satisfa tion of saying 'I told you so'? A boy's pride—is there anythin stronger and crazier?

"And after a while, naturally, thi turned into a vicious circle—th boy wouldn't say where he went a night, and this made his father ca him a bum, and this made the bo even more stubborn about keepin his mouth shut. Until finally, eve when the police arrested him, h couldn't back down from his prid and confess the truth. Sure it's no logical—unless you happen to be a eighteen-year-old boy."

Inspector Milner was beaming al over. "First thing tomorrow," h said, "I'll start checking all th schools for TV repairmen! Tha boy's mother—she's going to be s happy—"

A shadow came over Mom's face "I wouldn't count on this," she said

The Inspector looked up at he uncertainly. "I don't follow—"

"The boy didn't kill the cab dri ver," Mom said. "But just the same his red leather jacket and his black motorcycle cap were at the scene o the crime. You saw them running

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

iway from the cab, Davie, and your :yesight I wouldn't doubt. So if the ›oy wasn't wearing those things, who was?"

"He was wearing them when he vent out that night, Mom. His nother and father both say so."

"Absolutely. Every night, when ıe went out, he wore them. Because ıis father didn't want him to. But vhat about when he got to his re-›airman school? He couldn't show ıp *there* in such a crazy outfit. He ıad to wear a neat clean suit there, ike any other serious hard-work-ng student. So before he reached he school every night, there had to ›e some place where he could take ›ff the red jacket and put on the ıice suit—and when school was ›ver for the night, he had to go ›ack to this place and change into he jacket again, and leave the suit or the next night.

"Where could he find such a ›lace? A hotel room? But how ould he afford it? A friend's place? 3ut who could he trust with such a ecret? One person only. His sister –what's-her-name?—Inez. She's a ear older than him, she has a room n a hotel downtown, she hates their ather even worse than he does. The ight of the murder he left his red ıcket and his black cap with her, he way he's been doing for months –and after he left for his school, he put on his jacket and his cap, he way *she's* been doing for ıonths, and she went out to rob ab drivers. With a pair of pants it's a perfect disguise for her—because the cab driver would swear to the police that he was robbed by a boy, not a girl."

"And Rafael is a small thin boy!" I said. "He wears his hair long, like all these kids nowadays. In that red jacket and that motorcycle cap—not to mention the family resemblance —it's no wonder Palazzo identified him as the killer!"

"And it's no wonder," Mom said, "you thought you saw him running away from the scene of the crime."

There was a silence. Then a soft sigh came out of Inspector Milner. "I'll have her picked up tonight," he said. "And I guess I'll call her mother—"

Another silence, and then Shirley couldn't contain herself any longer. "That's all very well, Mother," she burst out, "but what about the *old* murder, the Sadie Katz murder? Did they ever find out who killed *her?*"

Mom turned to Shirley, smiled at her a moment, then said, "Did I forget to tell you? Excuse me, my mistake. Mama found out who killed her—naturally."

"Your mother was able to explain the fountain pen?" Shirley said. "And the phone call—when Sadie Katz seemed to be talking to your fiancé and inviting him up to her room?"

"The phone call was Mama's best clue to the real murderer," Mom said. "Why did the police think it was Mendel who made that call?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Why was Mendel supposed to be the man Sadie Katz invited up to her room? She had plenty of men on the string—including somebody who never came for her at the rooming house, but always made her meet him outside—so why should the police pick on Mendel?

"Well, like Mama pointed out, it all boiled down to one thing that Sadie said to that man on the phone—'What are you afraid of? You're still a free man, aren't you? You can do what you like.' Who could Sadie have meant by these words except a single man who was about to get married? And except for Mendel there was no such man in her acquaintance.

"But Mendel had an alibi for the murder—so Sadie *wasn't* talking to him on the phone. So, like Mama told me, 'Maybe those words didn't mean what everybody thinks. After all, who heard Sadie saying those words? Mr. and Mrs. Spiegel—two old people that just came over from Germany five years ago, that never learned English so good, that prefer Yiddish plays to American plays because they can't understand what the American actors are saying. Isn't there a good chance these two people maybe didn't hear so clearly what Sadie Katz said on the phone?'

Mama didn't have to go on. In a flash I saw what she was getting at. "Mama, that's the answer! The Spiegels thought that Sadie Katz said, *You're still a free man, aren't you? You can do what you lik*
But what she really said was, *You'r Friedman, aren't you? You can d what you like.* It was Mr. Friedma her boss, that she was talking to o the phone. She'd been having an a fair with him—he's the man wh never picked her up at the roomin house, who'd been meeting her ou side. He called her up that nigh and wanted to see her. She insiste he should come to her place, an when he said he was afraid som body might see him, she laughe and said that a big shot like hir could do what he liked.

"So he came to the roomin house and went upstairs with he —and maybe he told her he wante to break off their affair—and mayb she got mad and threatened to te his wife. So he strangled her. An as for the fountain pen, Mam —well, when Mendel got hom from the shop yesterday, didn't h stand on the stoop and wave at pec ple and show them the fountai pen? And didn't Sadie Katz run u to him at that moment and throv her arms around him and kiss him So maybe, in his surprise, h dropped the pen, and maybe Sadi picked it up—automatically, absen minded, the way people do—an that explains what it was doing i her room!"

I stopped talking and waited fo Mama to tell me what a detectiv genius I was. But she only shoo her head.

"Half answers, always half an

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

swers," she said. "Out of *you're still a free man, aren't you?* how could you get *you're Friedman, aren't you?* Where's the *still,* and where's the *a?* Even if you didn't understand English so good, you'd notice that certain sounds were left over. What Sadie really said on the phone had to be a lot closer to what the Spiegels thought they heard."

"But what *was* it, Mama?"

"Baby," Mama said, "it's a well known fact that embarrassed husbands commit a lot less murders than jealous wives."

"Mrs. Friedman? *She's* the one—"

"Why not?" Mama said. "She found out about her husband's affair, and she called up Sadie Katz on the phone and demanded to see her that night. She wanted to meet Sadie uptown, but Sadie liked the idea of making this ritzy rich woman come down to her. *What are you afraid of?* Sadie said to her. *You're Stella Friedman, aren't you? You can do what you like.* And sure enough, an hour or so later, Stella Friedman *did* what she liked—she strangled Sadie to death!"

Mom stopped for a breath, then went on quietly, "At the trial, incidentally, the jury found her not guilty, on the grounds of temporary insanity."

That was the end of Mom's story. I breathed a sigh of relief. What I feared hadn't happened. She had gone through all that reminiscing about the old days, about her wedding day, but she looked as cheerful as ever.

And then my heart sank. Suddenly there were tears filling Mom's eyes.

"What's the matter?" Inspector Milner cried. "Is there anything I can do?"

"I'm all right, I'm all right," Mom said. "I was only thinking—the younger generation today, the younger generation in the old days, maybe there is a difference after all. Poor Mendel—he was ready to die so he shouldn't make his father ashamed of him. And this Ortiz boy—he was ready to die so he shouldn't make his father *proud* of him."

Slowly Mom began to shake her head. "It's a funny world we're living in these days. Mama wouldn't like it much, I think. It's a good thing maybe that she never lived to see it."

Mom lowered her eyes. A moment later she took out a handkerchief and blew her nose. When she looked up, she was smiling again. "So now for dessert," she said. "In your honor, Inspector, I baked an angel food!"

Then Mom got to her feet, and like a general at the head of his victorious army she marched out to the kitchen.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ANTHONY BOUCHER'S HONOR ROLL

of Distinguished New Mystery Stories published in American magazines

EQMM's percentages

1962	43.6%
1963	50.8%
1964	44.1%
1965	55.0%
1966	50.0%

Nearly one-half of the distinguished new mystery stories published in all American magazines in the last 5 years (252 stories out of 516) appeared first in *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine;* and these 252 Honor Roll stories did not include the superior reprints, both short stories and short novels, which are offered by *EQMM* each month.

"*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* is the best crime-fiction periodical ever published."

—**Anthony Boucher**
The New York Times Book Review,
October 30, 1966

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ıued from other side)

ours for only $1

$40.30 worth of new mysteries
(IN PUBLISHERS' ORIGINAL EDITIONS)

ludes 9 e Stanley Gardner's d 2 more new thrillers

USE this is our "Silver Anniver-y," we're offering you ELEVEN awer mystery thrillers – worth in original publishers' editions the astonishingly low price of $1.00! You get the *very latest* Mason along with two more new eries in a big 3-in-1 edition . . . 8 more Gardner greats in 4 e-length, hard-bound volumes. nake this spectacular offer to ery fans in order to celebrate nniversary and to show you the advantages of membership in Detective Book Club.

ream of New Mysteries for LESS than 97¢ EACH

a member you are offered the ı of the brand-new mysteries p writers. Each month you get E of them complete in ONE ome volume (a $10.50 to $11.95 in publishers' regular retail ns) for only $2.89. You need take any specific number of – only those you want after ıg the free Club "Preview" sent u well in advance. Your books ean and fresh, delivered right to door.

ND NO MONEY – Just Mail stcard for ALL 11 Mysteries

ı may cancel membership any you please. These ELEVEN ex-

citing stories are only the beginning of your fun and savings. SEND NO MONEY NOW–just mail postcard to:

THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB
Roslyn, L. I., New York 11576

MAIL THIS POSTCARD NOW FOR YOUR ELEVEN MYSTERIES • NO POSTAGE NEEDED

SEND NO MONEY – JUST MAIL THIS POSTCARD 15-303

THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB 8-GG
Roslyn, L. I., New York 11576

Please enroll me as a member and send me at once the FOUR double-length, hard-bound editions of Perry Mason & Donald Lam-Bertha Cool thrillers, PLUS the brand-new 3-in-1 volume Club selection containing Erle Stanley Gardner's latest Perry Mason and 2 more great mysteries. I enclose NO MONEY IN ADVANCE; within a week after receiving my books, I will either return them all and owe nothing, or keep ALL FIVE volumes, containing ELEVEN first-rate mystery stories, for the special new-member introductory price of ONLY $1.00 (plus a few cents mailing charge).

As a member, I am to receive advance descriptions of all future selections, but am not obligated to buy any. For each future Triple Volume I decide to keep, I will send you only $2.89 (plus a few cents mailing charge). I may reject any volume before or after I receive it, and I may cancel my membership at any time. (Books shipped in U.S.A. only.)

Mr. / Mrs. / Miss .....
(PLEASE PRINT PLAINLY)

Address .....

City ..... State: ..... ZIP .....

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EXCITING 25th ANNIVERSARY OFFER

11 Top Mysteries for $1.00

AS A NEW MEMBER

including 9 great Erle Stanley Gardner hits

$7.00 in Publ. Eds.

$7.45 in Publ. Eds.

YOU GET 4 Perry Mason bafflers and 4 Donald Lam-Bertha Cool thrillers (which Gardner writes under the name A. A. Fair) in 4 hard-bound 2-in-1 volumes.

1 The Case of the WORRIED WAITRESS
A worried waitress is up for murder and a worried Perry is stuck with a *blind witness*.

2 TRAPS NEED FRESH BAIT
Donald Lam investigates a want ad that is looking for a *patsy* — for a *murder*.

3 The Case of the BEAUTIFUL BEGGAR
Perry agrees to help a lovely girl — who turns out to be a *cunning murderess*.

4 WIDOWS WEAR WEEDS
The police, and *witnesses*, say DONALD LAM put that knife in Calvert's back!

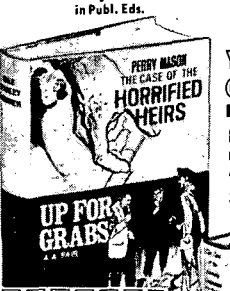
5 The Case of the TROUBLED TRUSTEE
Dutton was *with* Palmer. Dutton's gun *killed* Palmer. Can Perry ever save Dutton?

6 CUT THIN TO WIN
Donald Lam pays $10,000 for an "accident" that now looks like an alibi for *murder*.

7 The Case of the HORRIFIED HEIRS
Perry's client and Mrs. Trent have a mutual "friend" who wants to *kill them both*.

8 UP FOR GRABS
Nurse Doon is terrified. She *knows* the patient who "left" the hospital was DEAD.

$7.00 in Publ. Eds.



$7.00 in Publ. Eds.

YOU AL GET the Perry Mas plus 2 mo new mys teries in t 3-in-1 vo

in P

9 The Case o QUEENLY CONTESTANT by Erle Stanle Gardner
Perry is invol with a $2,000,00 tate, blackmail, a *baffling murde*

10 FEAR OF STRANGE by Rae Foley
A strange ki wants Kay For $400,000 — and *can't stop him.*

11 DEADLY DE by Aaron S Stein
A simple enginee job on a *chu* turns into *mur*

(See other sid

FIRST CLASS
PERMIT No. 47
Roslyn, N. Y.

BUSINESS REPLY MAIL
No postage stamp necessary if mailed in the United States

POSTAGE WILL BE PAID BY

THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB
Roslyn, L. I.
New York 11576

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED